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VERIFICATION AND NON-VERIFICATION: THEME
AND TECHNIQUE IN THE WORK OF HAROLD PINTER

by



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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Verification and Non-Verification: Theme and Technique in the Work of Harold Pinter" submitted by W. John Foy in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

ABSTRACT

Verification and non-verification are two concepts that are central to Harold Pinter's dramatic art, both in terms of theme and technique. Non-verification is a technique that includes mystification, contradiction, vagueness and ambiguity -- all the devices that impart an air of mystery and a feeling of the proximity of the unknown to Pinter's plays. Verification refers to the attempt to discover the nature of reality that every man must make. Pinter's stated position on this matter is that "The desire for verification is understandable but cannot always be satisfied" (see page two below).

This thesis surveys The Room, The Birthday Party and The Dumb Waiter as plays in which the technique of non-verification is all-important. Various aspects of the technique are found to include the juxtaposition of naturalistic detail with unverified characters and situations, the use of extended silence, a concern for the difficulties of communication, contradictions, repetition of indefinite statements, the unexpected arrival of unverifiable characters, unspoken or inconclusive hints, and many other minor facets too numerous to catalogue. The Dumb Waiter is also found to contain the germ of some of Pinter's later plays -- a character's futile quest for truth.

The body of the thesis studies particular plays to discover Pinter's approaches to the problem of verification. In The Caretaker, a particular character enunciates by his very presence the problem of the ambiguity of truth. Moreover, the other characters, inasmuch as they participate in

he is by no means simply an imitator of them. Finally, the fact that Pinter's approaches and achievements are important and valid in the modern world is substantiated by certain key passages from The Homecoming and The Dwarfs that both sum up and conclude the argument of the study.

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I

INTRODUCTION

The concept of verification is central to a number of Harold Pinter's plays. It is important both implicitly, because of certain stylistic techniques that Pinter uses (more properly labelled non-verification in this context); and explicitly, when the problem of verification in a world of ambiguities and half-truths is confronted as a theme. Pinter realizes that a quest for certainty or verification is central to man's nature and that verification is the ultimate goal of all seeking for understanding or knowledge. He portrays man's quest for verification by outlining the problems of that quest -- lack of certain knowledge, contradiction, and generally the impossibility of distinguishing between truth and falsehood. These problems of life Pinter utilizes both as dramatic devices within his technique of non-verification, and as thematic trends within the general theme of verification.

This thesis proposes to consider Pinter's techniques in terms of the concept of non-verification, to relate non-verification as technique to verification as theme, and to study Pinter's approaches to this theme. The following plays will be analysed in considerable detail: The Room, The Dumb Waiter, The Birthday Party, The Caretaker, A Slight Ache, Tea Party, The Lover, The Basement, and The Collection, while reference will also be made to some of Pinter's other works, both drama and poetry. An attempt will also be made to relate Pinter's works to the general context

of modern drama, particularly with regard to the ways in which Pinter differs from his forerunners, Beckett, Ionesco, and Pirandello.

That the concept of verification is a central one in Pinter's thought is substantiated both by examination of the plays and by remarks made by Pinter himself in interviews, letters and a program note. As early as 1960, the following note, attached to the program for a production of The Room and The Dumb Waiter at the Royal Court Theatre announces Pinter's interest in the problems of verification. While he specifically mentions the problem of identity, Pinter's note refers in a broader perspective to the difficulty of verifying any fact in a world of uncertainty and ambiguity. The note, in part, reads as follows:

We all have our function. The visitor will have his. There is no guarantee, however, that he will possess a visiting card with detailed information as to his last place of residence, last job, next job, number of dependants, etc. Nor, for the comfort of all, an identity card, nor a label on his chest. The desire for verification is understandable but cannot always be satisfied. There are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false. The thing is not necessarily either true or false: it can be both true and false. The assumption that to verify what has happened and what is happening presents few problems I take to be inaccurate. A character on the stage who can present no convincing argument or information as to his past experience, his present behavior or his aspirations, nor give a comprehensive analysis of his motives is as legitimate and as worthy of attention as one who, alarmingly, can do all these things. The more acute the experience, the less articulate its expression.¹

This note illuminates both Pinter's technique and his interest in the theme of verification. It explains, on the one hand, the philosophy behind many of Pinter's stage techniques, where a dearth of information and verifiable fact is the keynote. On the other hand, it also identifies

his interest, dramatic and philosophic, in the problem of verification in a complex world in which things are often "both true and false". It is from this basis that Pinter's work will be explored in terms of theme and technique. The goal of this thesis is not to discover what the finally verified answer to any question is, but rather to explore the possibilities of verification in terms of the artistic approaches Pinter has provided. Thus, the direction of the thesis is not towards interpretation, especially in the narrow sense of definition, but rather the aim will be to realize fully the scope of possibilities presented, and to argue for acceptance of the validity of the images Pinter presents in the light of the concepts of verification and non-verification.

The technique of non-verification centres around what for some critics is the annoying lack of clear information in a play by Harold Pinter. There is a lack of facts regarding the characters, their backgrounds, their present actions and their hopes for the future. The meanings of acts or situations are not explained. Often our awareness of this general deprivation of information is further aggravated by the presence of contradictory information -- the plays present one set of facts at one moment and just the opposite set a moment later. Clarification (or even recognition of the contradictions) is rarely, if ever, given. J.R. Taylor neatly describes this aspect of Pinter's technique as "The technique of casting doubt upon everything by matching each apparently clear and unequivocal statement with an equally clear and unequivocal statement of its contrary."² Such facets of the technique of non-verification are coupled with the presence of vague hints that are never ratified, possibilities that are implied but not explored,

and a general awareness of the encroaching unknown that surrounds all of Pinter's characters. This consciousness of the unknown becomes so powerful that it tends to excite considerable tension, both in the characters in the play and in the audience or reader. Awareness of the unknown and a gradual increase of expectation of the unexpected provide the source of much of the dramatic tension of Pinter's plays.

The theme of verification is both implicit and explicit in Pinter's works. Pinter's interest in the subject is implied by his continual use of the technique of non-verification. The ramifications of the technique soon extend beyond the boundaries of the stage and suggest possibilities about the world which surrounds the stage. The universality and validity of Pinter's perceptions of the world are soon felt. Moreover, the theme of verification is explicitly pursued in a number of Pinter's plays. His concern with the theme suggests an exploration or a quest into the nature of reality, particularly the realities of personality, since many of the plays can be said to have for their setting the mind of a man. Delving into the nature of reality, for Pinter, is not simply asking "What is true?" but rather perceiving, accepting and exploring the myriad possibilities available when one realizes that there is no absolute answer to that question.

The areas that the thesis will explore are implied by the above remarks. It will open with a consideration of some of Pinter's stylistic devices that are related to non-verification, especially as seen in The Room, The Dumb Waiter, and The Birthday Party. It will then generally consider the effects of the technique and relate its use to the theme of verification. The major portion of the thesis will examine Pinter's

approaches to the theme as it appears in various contexts throughout his plays. Certain particular subject areas will be discussed in the light of specific plays. In examining The Caretaker, the focus will be the character of Davies, a personality who becomes, in the context of the play, the objective correlative of the problem of verification. With regard to A Slight Ache the problems of self-examination, identity and verification will be discussed; with Tea Party the interrelation of perception and verification will be considered. In The Lover the problem of overlapping layers of personal realities will be considered, and in The Basement the focus will be on the possible permutations and combinations of reality in subjective terms. Finally the thesis will examine The Collection, the play that embodies the climax of Pinter's artistic realization that absolute truth is not a readily available commodity in our world. Some reference will also be made to The Dwarfs and The Homecoming.

II

NON-VERIFICATION AS TECHNIQUE

1. The Room

The Room, written in 1957, contains the essence of the stylistic features that earned Pinter a reputation as the creator of a new genre of plays -- the "comedies of menace".¹ The atmosphere of menace is so pervasive and emphatic in The Room that, in the absence of clear thematic trends, it becomes the theme of the play. The almost palpable tension that is the main source of the atmosphere of menace arises, paradoxically, from the juxtaposition of Pinter's tendency towards non-verification with his equally ardent concern for naturalistic detail. Thus, treatment of the techniques of non-verification cannot avoid placing them in the context of the room that Pinter presents.

The room that Rose and Bert live in is completely furnished by Pinter, even to the inclusion of the bacon, eggs, bread and tea that Bert is served by his doting wife. The many details make the room itself a very real, substantial abode. Yet the action that occurs in this room is totally unverified, and completely lacks definition. The irony inherent in this juxtaposition of real, substantial details with vague, insubstantial characters and action contributes to the strength of the mood of uncertainty and fear of the unknown that permeates the play. Somehow the contrast between the naturalistic setting and the unreal forces that inhabit it tends to heighten our awareness of the unknown to the extent that this consciousness becomes the most powerful effect of the play. The proximity

of the unknown and the resultant fear and tension are the sources of the dramatic force of the play, and are produced mainly by Pinter's technique of non-verification.

The most immediately recognizable aspect of this technique is Bert's total silence during the major portion of the play. Although Rose natters at him constantly about the cold weather and the dampness that must be endured by whoever lives in the basement, and plies him with food and warm clothes for his trip out into the winter night, Bert says nothing. Even when Mr Kidd, the landlord, pays a visit and speaks directly to him about the treacherous driving conditions and the need for caution when driving, Bert remains silent.

This extended silence on Bert's part is typical of Pinter's use of language (or the lack of it) as a means toward non-verification. The fact that the reason for Bert's silence is not mentioned increases the dramatic effectiveness of the device. Two elements are at work in these opening views of The Room -- Rose's constant and inconsequential chatter and Bert's silence. It is not long before it becomes apparent that, in terms of the dramatist's attempt to communicate, both the words and the silence are equally effective. At the same time, however, communication within the play is negligible -- again words and silence are equal: in this context, equally ineffective. The opening of the play thus succeeds both in presenting the state of Rose's mind by expressing her deepest fears and insecurities through her rambling monologue, and also presents a sample of one of the technical devices Pinter utilizes to create an atmosphere of unverified menace. Why Bert is silent is important only to the same extent that Rose is loquacious (it is her nature); more

important is the actual fact of the silence. Bert's silence is a void, an unknown. As such it is an analogy both of the source of Rose's fears and the source of all the unverified action that is to follow. It becomes an image arising from within that paradoxically corresponds to the unverified vagueness of existence outside the room.

Similar devices are at work in conversations that Pinter presents. In our first glimpse of this facet of the technique, it is the combination of Mr Kidd's almost other-worldly absent-mindedness with Rose's insecurity that points up the difficulties of communication between people at different levels of awareness. It seems typical of conversation in Pinter's works that, when two people are talking to each other, what they say does not meet at a mid-point of common understanding as we expect it to. Instead, thoughts and the words that express them fly off like volleys of shots into the dark, cold night, sometimes ricocheting off in unexpected flashes of meaning.² Consider this conversation between Rose and Mr Kidd:

ROSE. How many floors you got in this house?
MR KIDD. Floors. (He laughs.) Ah, we had a good few of them in the old days.
ROSE. How many have you got now?
MR KIDD. Well, to tell you the truth, I don't count them now.
ROSE. Oh.
MR KIDD. No, not now.
ROSE. It must be a bit of a job.
MR KIDD. Oh, I used to count them, once. Never got tired of it. I used to keep a tack on everything in this house. I had a lot to keep my eye on, then. I was able for it too. That was when my sister was alive. But I lost track a bit, after she died. She's been dead some time, my sister. It was a good house then. She was a capable woman. Yes. Fine size of a woman too. I think she took after my mum. Yes, I think she took after my old mum, from what I can recollect. I think my mum was a Jewess. Yes, I wouldn't be surprised to learn that she was a Jewess. She didn't have many babies.
ROSE. What about your sister, Mr Kidd?
MR KIDD. What about her?

ROSE. Did she have any babies?
 MR KIDD. Yes, she had a resemblance to my old mum, I think.
 Taller, of course.
 ROSE. When did she die then, your sister?
 MR KIDD. Yes, that's right, it was after she died that I must
 have stopped counting. She used to keep things in
 very good trim. And I gave her a helping hand. She
 was very grateful, right until her last. She always
 used to tell me how much she appreciated all the --
 little things -- that I used to do for her. Then she
 copped it. I was her senior. Yes, I was her senior.
 She had a lovely boudoir. A beautiful boudoir.
 ROSE. What did she die of?
 MR KIDD. Who?
 ROSE. Your sister?
 Pause.
 MR KIDD. I've made ends meet.
 Pause.

(14-15)³

This type of conversation, in which a specific question leads the speakers into all sorts of dark byways of their minds, yet is never answered, is central to Pinter's development of mood and character through non-verification. Not only do Mr Kidd's non-sequitors and illogical progressions establish the nature of his own personality explicitly, but they also imply certain things about the nature of his house and those that inhabit it. Thus, Pinter's shaping of the rhythms of everyday conversation, with all its inability to provide verified and believable facts, contributes greatly to the atmosphere of tension that gives the play its force by enveloping it in a cloud of non-verification.

Other elements also produce this tension. For instance, at one point early in the play Rose goes to the window and looks out:

It's quiet. Be coming on for dark. There's no one about.
She stands, looking.
 Wait a minute.
Pause.
 I wonder who that is.
Pause.
 No. I thought I saw someone.
Pause.
 No.

(10)

In these few lines Rose's perceptions reverse themselves twice, from seeing "no one about", to glimpsing someone, to realizing that there is no one there after all. This is not extraordinary; indeed it is a realistic presentation of the workings of an insecure woman's mind. It would not even be exciting if it were not coupled with the tension the play has already built up. Pinter, however, deliberately continues to play on this device, forcing the audience or reader to question their own perceptions just as the characters do. When there is a loud, ominous knocking at the door, Rose calls out "Who is it?" (11) But the knocking continues until Rose has called out three more times. Only then does Pinter allow the entrance of Mr Kidd. The delay of his entrance naturally heightens the already powerful suspense.

These situations prepare for later occurrences in the play. After both Bert and Mr Kidd have left, and Rose is alone, she hesitates for a moment, looks around, and then opens the door to take out some garbage. Mr and Mrs Sands suddenly appear on the landing. Their appearance is startling, both to Rose and to the audience, but the developments they herald are even more startling. The tension aroused by the heightening of awareness of the unknown is further increased by Pinter's introduction of these two unexpected characters. As emissaries from the void outside, the Sands are excellent elements of non-verification. While the opening of The Room introduces us to the use of language and silence as non-verification devices, the play now moves to present what happens when contradictions are introduced and doubt begins to be felt.

The Sands are looking for the landlord, since they are interested in renting a room in the house, but they do not agree with Rose that the

landlord's name is Mr Kidd. In fact, the play, as it progresses from this point, seems to question the very existence of Mr Kidd along with his name. When told once more that Mr Kidd is the landlord Mr Sands again questions "Is he?" and Mrs Sands adds "Maybe there are two landlords." After a long pause her husband responds, as if knowingly: "That'll be the day." (19) The same doubt about Mr Kidd's existence is expressed again later, when Rose suggests that they'll find him "about somewhere".

MR SANDS. He lives here, does he?
ROSE. Of course he lives here.
MR SANDS. And you say he's the landlord, is he?
ROSE. Of course he is.
MR SANDS. Well, say I wanted to get hold of him, where would I find him?
ROSE. Well -- I'm not sure.
MR SANDS. He lives here, does he?
ROSE. Yes, but I don't know --
MR SANDS. You don't know exactly where he hangs out?
ROSE. No, not exactly.
MR SANDS. But he does live here, doesn't he?
Pause.

(20-21)

Mr Sands' continual doubts and questions add immensely to the aura of uncertainty that hangs over the whole play. At this point, after the repetition of the same question concerning Mr Kidd's existence, our feelings even about the validity of our earlier perceptions of him become uncertain. But the problem is never solved. Why the Sands seem to feel that Mr Kidd is not the landlord is never explained. And, in fact, after strengthening the link between Rose and the dark, damp basement, out of which will emerge the blind Negro, the Sands disappear as quickly as they arrived. Before they leave, however, the couple continue to operate as a vehicle of non-verification and repeatedly draw a curtain of doubt around the play.

Other examples of this tendency are manifold. When the two visitors appeared at Rose's landing, they claimed to have "just come up the stairs" (17). Mr Sands repeats this apparent fact twice, as if to reinforce its validity. Later however, after describing their visit to the basement, Mrs Sands explains that:

Anyway, we got out then and we came out and we went to the top of the house. I don't know whether it was the top. There was a door locked on the stairs, so there might have been another floor, but we didn't see anyone, and it was dark, and we were just coming down again when you opened your door.

ROSE. You said you were going up.

MRS SANDS. What?

ROSE. You said you were going up before.

MRS SANDS. No, we were coming down.

ROSE. You didn't say that before.

MRS SANDS. We'd been up.

MR SANDS. We'd been up. We were coming down.

Pause.

(23-4)

With this exchange doubts about the Sands are strengthened, thus increasing the doubts induced by the contradictory information they continually add to the suspense, fear and uncertainty that the play contains.

The final piece of unverified information that the Sands add to the play concerns Rose's already expressed insecurity about possession of her room. From the opening of the play, Rose continually contrasts the warmth, light and security of her room with the cold, dark outside world and with the dark, damp basement. She wonders who it is that lives in the basement now and always returns to the secure thought that her room "is a good room. You've got a chance in a place like this You stand a chance" (11). Thus, when Mrs Sands mentions that the man in the basement (whom they never saw, it was so dark) told them that

there was a room vacant, it immediately arouses Rose's fears. She reacts by directly stating what she feels is the truth of the matter:

| | |
|-----------|---|
| ROSE. | You won't find any rooms vacant in this house. |
| MR SANDS. | Why not? |
| ROSE. | Mr Kidd told me. He told me. |
| MR SANDS. | Mr Kidd? |
| ROSE. | He told me he was full up. |
| MR SANDS. | The man in the basement said there was one. One room. Number seven he said. |
| | <u>Pause.</u> |
| ROSE. | That's this room. |

(24)

At this point we appear to have reached a crux of the play and expect to find only the working out of the problem. However, it is at this point that the Sands leave, never to be seen again. When Mr Kidd arrives at the door immediately after, with the message that the man in the basement wants to see Rose, he does not respond at all to her pleas for clarification of the situation. All Rose's fears and doubts (and all of the audience's also) are summoned up in a few lines of dialogue of the type that have become Pinter's calling card:

| | |
|----------|---|
| ROSE. | Mr Kidd, what did they mean about this room? |
| MR KIDD. | What room? |
| ROSE. | Is this room vacant? |
| MR KIDD. | Vacant? |
| ROSE. | They were looking for the landlord. |
| MR KIDD. | Who were? |
| ROSE. | Listen, Mr Kidd, you are the landlord, aren't you? There isn't any other landlord? |

(25)

But Rose's pleas are to no avail. Mr Kidd has simply come to tell her about the man who has been waiting in the basement for "the whole weekend" (26) to see Rose as soon as her husband leaves. Mr Kidd claims that it is very trying for him to have this man waiting there:

He hasn't given me any rest. Just lying there. In the black dark. Hour after hour. Why don't you leave me be, both of you? (27)

But Rose refuses to see the man because, as she reiterates three times, she doesn't know him. However, when Mr Kidd suggests that the man will come up even if her husband is there, she relents immediately, saying: "Fetch him. Quick. Quick!" (28)

This is the point in the play at which Pinter's use of the technique of non-verification becomes most apparent. Everything has led up to this moment: Rose's comparisons of her warm room with the cold basement, Mrs Sands' story about the man they talked to, and Rose's mention of the fact that she was once in the basement, "once, a long time ago" (21). Mr Sands' retort to this last, when he says "You haven't been here all that long, have you?" (22) simply strengthens the uncertainty that surrounds the play. One feels at this point that Pinter can only begin to pierce the veil of mysteries that surround Rose and her life in the room. Nonetheless, Pinter does not. If anything, his conscious efforts at cultivating uncertainty and keeping the audience in the dark become more pronounced, even to a fault (according to most critics⁴) at the end of the play.

Who the blind Negro is that tells Rose that her father wants her to come home we never know. But there are hints that there is some strange connection between Rose and the Negro. When the man says that his name is Riley, Rose begins: "I don't care if it's --" then breaks off, saying: "What? That's not your name. That's not your name"⁵ (28). Although she vehemently disclaims the possibility that Riley has a message for her, after a pause, she asks: "What message? Who have you got a message from? Who?" (30) Then the Negro calls Rose by the name of Sal and she does not deny that it is her name but weakly protests, saying: "Don't call me that" (30). Her protests soon fade however, and as Riley repeats "Come home now,

Sal" (31), she responds to him, touching "his eyes, the back of his head and his temples with her hands" (31).

At this Bert returns, and speaks for the first time, telling in language that is brutal and in terms that could be sexual, of his trip out and back in his van. He tells how he "drove her down, hard" and "drove her back, hard" (31-2). At first he does not appear to notice the Negro, then suddenly pulls the armchair out from under him. As Riley tries to get up, he begins to speak, saying, "Mr Hudd, your wife --", but Bert only yells "Lice!" (32) and kicks his head against the stove until he is still. The play ends with a blackout at this point as Rose "stands clutching her eyes" (32) saying, "Can't see. I can't see. I can't see" (32).

Although some critics (Esslin in particular⁶) feel that the ending of The Room is a failure, perhaps this tendency is simply due to critical overinterpretation. Recognizing that the play is an exercise in the principle of non-verification enables one to appreciate the overall movement towards a climax -- a moment of complete and final unverified action. In this sense, the ending is true to the rest of the play⁷. Naturally, The Room is more than just an exercise in a particular technique and there are other useful approaches one can take. But critics generally have underestimated the importance of non-verification and have been content simply to attempt interpretation. And, although I agree that there are elements presented at the end of the play that are not completely assimilated into the fabric of the whole, I feel that it is more important to consider the effect of Pinter's techniques than to try to interpret them. If we stick by what Pinter himself said concerning the legitimacy of unverified characters, the blind Negro must be accepted without too much questioning.

Acceptance of the character necessitates acceptance of the events that surround him. Thus, Riley's death and Rose's blindness should also be accepted as the climax of unverified action. That this is a valid and useful approach to the play is evidenced by difficulty critics have had in concocting amazing stories to explain the end of The Room.⁸ Certainly The Room is not Pinter's best play, and the melodrama of its ending must be criticized. The fault is not that unverifiable events occur, rather it is that, in themselves, those events devolve into arbitrary violence and mere melodrama, and thus weaken the powerful dramatic force that the aura of uncertainty and menace has created through non-verification. To attempt to pin down the meaning of the play, however, or to define in an absolute sense what it deals with is to destroy its main force -- the atmosphere of uncertainty.

In terms of the technique of non-verification, The Room announces Pinter's intentions. The term "comedy of menace" aptly describes the atmosphere that Pinter's technique produces. But menace is not the only result of non-verification and doubt. Pinter's plays explore the nature of reality, the ambiguity of truth and falsehood, and discover that the last word cannot always be said. Rose's blindness at the end of The Room, for example, appears as a necessary result of the destruction of the blind Negro. The reasons for the fact, however, cannot be defined. What is important is not so much what Rose's blindness means, but the fact that it is the final result of the play, the culmination of the movement towards unverified action. Pinter appears to consider that the artist is not to be regarded as a Creator and Definer, but rather simply a suggester, a linker together of the myriad possibilities that make up man's existence.

The Room, though it is not always convincing in its presentation of the ambiguity of truth, the unverified nature of reality, nonetheless points out Pinter's interests. He is not one to dictate answers, rather he wishes only to present perceptions. Unlike Mr Sands, he will not force his vision on us. In a light-hearted sense, the following exchange between Mr and Mrs Sands could be taken as Pinter's overview of that sort of literary criticism that is too often concerned with definition rather than with the richness of possibilities:

MRS SANDS. Now I come to think of it, I saw a star.
MR SANDS. You saw what?
MRS SANDS. Well, I think I did.
MR SANDS. You think you saw what?
MRS SANDS. A star.
MR SANDS. Where?
MRS SANDS. In the sky.
MR SANDS. When?
MRS SANDS. As we were coming along.
MR SANDS. Go home.
MRS SANDS. What do you mean?
MR SANDS. You didn't see a star.
MRS SANDS. Why not?
MR SANDS. Because I'm telling you. I'm telling you you
didn't see a star.

Pause.

(19-20)

As usual, Pinter does not provide the final answer regarding Mrs Sands' sighting of the star. His presentation of the problem ends with a pause, the silence that confronts any of his searchers after the ultimate truth. There are no definite answers, since contradictions provide only possibilities.

2. The Birthday Party

In terms of the technique of non-verification, The Birthday Party (written in 1957) continues to exploit such devices as contradiction,

repetition of indefinite statements, the unexpected arrival of unverified and unverifiable characters, unspoken hints about the past, and an inconclusive ending. But The Birthday Party is a much finer play than The Room. Its unverified elements are firmly woven together within the personalities of the characters and thus are not simply arbitrary devices -- a criticism levelled against The Room. Also, The Birthday Party is a full-length play (Pinter's first) and combines such a variety of unverified elements within what has rightly been called a "valid poetic image"⁹, that its total dramatic effect is very powerful. In dealing with The Birthday Party it will be useful to consider a number of these unverified elements, not in terms of interpretations or answers that can be devised, but rather simply in terms of the artistry involved in weaving these elements so closely into the fabric of the play. In this regard, the best point at which to begin is with the character of Stanley.

Like Davies in The Caretaker, Stanley is as close to being a completely unverified character as is possible without resorting to the presentation of a void as character (as Pinter later does, with the matchseller in A Slight Ache). Stanley's past is not totally unknown, but the hints that are presented are so vague and indefinite that no conclusions can be drawn. Stanley himself claims that he was a pianist before coming to Meg and Petey's seashore boarding house. His memories of his career are, however, so closely tied to his present fears and general paranoia that they lack credibility, to say the least. One technique Pinter uses to move the audience or reader to question the credibility of a character is to structure a movement from the general to the particular within the character's thoughts. A character will

make a very general -- but seemingly definite -- statement, and then will slowly qualify it by moving towards the particular. Presumably this movement is from exaggeration to actual fact, though even this supposition is questionable. Stanley's contribution to this game comes as he "speaks airily" (22) to Meg, telling her that he has been offered a job playing the piano on a "round the world tour" at such exotic places as Constantinople, Zagreb and Vladivostock:

MEG. [...] Have you played the piano in those places before?

STANLEY. Played the piano? I've played the piano all over the world. All over the country. (Pause.) I once gave a concert.

(22)

Stanley's memories of that concert read like a paranoid nightmare, and provide considerable insight into his character without verifying any facts:

STANLEY (to himself). I had a unique touch. Absolutely unique. They came up to me. They came up to me and said they were grateful. Champagne we had that night, the lot. (Pause.) My father nearly came down to hear me. Well, I dropped him a card anyway. But I don't think he could make it. No, I -- I lost the address, that was it. [...] Then after that, you know what they did? They carved me up. Carved me up. It was all arranged, it was all worked out. My next concert. Somewhere else it was. In winter. I went down there to play. Then, when I got there, the hall was closed, the place was shuttered up, not even a caretaker. They'd locked it up. [...] A fast one. They pulled a fast one. I'd like to know who was responsible for that. (Bitterly.) All right, Jack, I can take a tip. They want me to crawl down on my bended knees. Well, I can take a tip . . . any day of the week.

(22-3)

Pinter's continued use of the indefinite "they" adds an air of the unknown to the general vagueness and incoherence of Stanley's ramblings. This technique is used throughout the early portions of the play and thus raises

the level of dramatic tension. Consider, for example, this passage, in which Stanley plays on Meg's unvoiced fears (and perhaps on his own) by threatening her with the arrival of some undefined and evil (but expected?) visitors:

STANLEY (advancing). They're coming today. They're coming in a van.
 MEG. Who?
 STANLEY. And do you know what they've got in that van?
 MEG. What?
 STANLEY. They've got a wheelbarrow in that van.
 MEG (breathlessly). They haven't.
 STANLEY. Oh yes they have.
 MEG. You're a liar.
 [. . .]
 STANLEY. They're looking for someone.
 MEG. They're not.
 STANLEY. They're looking for someone. A certain person.
 MEG (hoarsely). No, they're not!
 STANLEY. Shall I tell you who they're looking for?
 MEG. No!
 STANLEY. You don't want me to tell you?
 MEG. You're a liar!

(24)

For Pinter, who or what Meg fears is an academic question. He disdains to answer academically and prefers to respond in a more dramatic mode. Thus, only a moment later the two strangers, Goldberg and McCann, arrive. The menace of their presence is immediately felt as Pinter portrays them appearing to have knowledge that is above the natural level:

MCCANN. Nat. How do we know this is the right house?
 GOLDBERG. What?
 MCCANN. How do we know this is the right house?
 GOLDBERG. What makes you think it's the wrong house?
 MCCANN. I didn't see a number on the gate.
 GOLDBERG. I wasn't looking for a number.

(28)

What Goldberg was looking for is not mentioned, so that the unmistakable result of the interchange is to impress on the audience or reader a feeling of the unrevealed power these two men wield.

Pinter also leaves the reason for Goldberg and McCann's presence unexplained, but he does hint that their function is similar to that of Ben and Gus in The Dumb Waiter. Goldberg's explanation of their "job" (29) is a masterpiece of vagueness and indefinite phraseology that conveys the appearance of being very direct. On one level Pinter is certainly satirizing the bureaucratic jargon of politics and commerce. Goldberg "speaks in a quiet, fluent, official tone" (30):

The main issue is a singular issue and quite distinct from your previous work. Certain elements, however, might well approximate in points of procedure to some of your other activities. All is dependent on the attitude of our subject. At all events, McCann, I can assure you that the assignment will be carried out and the mission accomplished with no excessive aggravation to you or myself. (30)

The former relationship between Goldberg and McCann and their "subject" (who we soon realize is Stanley if we haven't guessed it already) is also not clear. There are hints that suggest that Stanley was a member of some organization which he betrayed, so that he must now be punished. But whatever the case, whatever "the organization" (48) is, be it an underworld gangster group or simply that great organization called the human race, the more important feature of this play is the present interaction between Stanley and his persecutors. The hazy outline of the past is like a veil, not to be penetrated and destroyed, but rather to be admired for the beauty of the lacy vagueness that forms it. Vague reference to the past is simply a means of creating an atmosphere of fear, tension, uncertainty and menace by means of suggestion. Recognition of this precept relegates interpretation and definition to a place of secondary importance and opens an understanding of the tremendous dramatic force of the play.

Stanley's reaction to the arrival of the visitors is shocked dumbness. Then, when he is given a toy drum for a birthday present by Meg (though there is some doubt as to whether or not it is his birthday), his reaction is to lapse after a moment into an "erratic, uncontrolled" manner. Soon, "his face and the drumbeat [become] savage and possessed" (36). The regression bodes ill for Stanley. His first interaction with McCann degenerates into an urgent plea to leave him alone, for he has done no wrong. He hisses to McCann, "I've explained to you, damn you, that all those years I lived in Basingstoke I never stepped outside the door" (42).

Obviously Stanley regards Goldberg and McCann as a threat to his existence. The interaction between them consists of the slow wearing down of Stanley, until he appears at the end of the play washed and groomed but totally unable to communicate. The nature of the interaction between Stanley and Goldberg and McCann is primarily a struggle, portrayed by Pinter in a fantastic cross-examination scene, in which Stanley is questioned and accused at length concerning such a variety of topics as the organization, his wife, his mother, philosophy, politics and why the chicken crossed the road. The movement of the struggle is in Goldberg and McCann's favor, for they so ply Stanley with questions and accusations that he soon becomes unable to answer and can finally respond only with brute force. The cross-examination is loaded with unverified and unverifiable hints:

GOLDBERG. Where was your wife?

STANLEY. In --

GOLDBERG. Answer.

STANLEY (turning, crouched). What wife?

GOLDBERG. What have you done with your wife?

(49)

Once again, the question of whether or not Stanley ever had a wife (and if he did, did he kill her?) is not of primary importance. The intent and force of this passage is to depict the struggle in images that are comprehensible to all, though they need not be verifiable by anyone. Essentially, the facts do not matter; the struggle itself does. Clearly Stanley has been caught short by the volley of questions and has lost ground to the attackers because of his hesitation.

This frenetic cross-examination is paralleled later in the play by a kind of litany that Goldberg and McCann chant as the climax of their victory over Stanley. Like the cross-examination, the litany also covers an amazing variety of subjects and possibilities, but that Goldberg and McCann now completely control the situation is the more important factor. Stanley has been silenced, by whatever means, and now must endure the future that his captors dictate to him. The litany serves as an easily understandable image of the extent to which Stan has been subdued.

GOLDBERG. From now on, we'll be the hub of your wheel.
MCCANN. We'll renew your season ticket.
GOLDBERG. We'll take tuppence off your morning tea.
MCCANN. We'll give you a discount on all inflammable goods.
GOLDBERG. We'll watch over you.
MCCANN. Advise you.
GOLDBERG. Give you proper care and treatment.

(82)

The birthday party scene is the major step along Stan's downhill path to breakdown and subservience. It follows immediately after the cross-examination, which has already driven Stanley into silence. During the party, he fades further into the background as Pinter again capitalizes on his favorite device -- prolonged silence. The scene is almost entirely taken up with two streams of inconsequential dialogue -- between Goldberg and Lulu and between Meg and McCann -- which are superimposed on each

other in a very effective dramatic presentation.

Stanely's breakdown occurs after he is blindfolded for a game of blind man's buff. As he moves toward Meg his hands reach for her throat. Then, suddenly, the stage is plunged into blackness as the lights go out. Stan's breakdown is portrayed as a revolt against the female figures in his life. He begins to strangle Meg and attempts to rape Lulu. As the scene ends, McCann has found a flashlight and shines it at Stanley, who begins to giggle and move away towards the wall. Then, ominously, the figures of McCann and Goldberg "converge upon him" (66). At the end of the play, Stanley is taken away to see "Monty", though who or what he is, or why exactly Stanley is taken, we never know. Petey protests weakly but is rewarded only by an insidious threat from Goldberg.

To define Stan as "the artist whom society claims back" or as a man who is "driven out from his warm place of refuge on earth", or to label his fate as "the process of growing up, of expulsion from the warm, cosy world of childhood",¹⁰ and not to allow other possibilities is to ignore the largesse provided by Pinter's non-verification technique. Esslin, though he takes pains to point out that there is no contradiction among any of the three interpretations he offers, nonetheless fails to follow his own dictum. He wisely points out that the play is a "complex poetic image",¹¹ but still concerns himself with simply analyzing this image into levels, rather than dealing with the totality. Acceptance of the importance of the non-verification principle allows one to accept all possibilities simultaneously. Only in this way can the power or the dramatic force provided by the unverified possibilities and unknown menace of the play be fully recognized. In this sense, the non-verification

principle is somewhat like Keats' "negative capability" in that it increases one's scope. The dramatist, in that he is not tied to a set of absolutes, is able to broaden his perspective and thus increases the validity of the image of life that he portrays.

The most interesting aspect of Pinter's use of non-verification throughout this play is that it is so finely woven together. We never know who or what Goldberg and McCann actually are. This is reflected in the confusion of names that occurs throughout the play. Goldberg is variously called Nat, Simey, Benny and Judas (or is McCann referring to Stanley at this point? (52)), and McCann, near the end of the play (72) is called Dermot (or is this someone else entirely?). Our lack of clear knowledge about these two strangers is reflected in the most seemingly insignificant acts. McCann almost constantly tears newspapers into long strips and seems very jealous about guarding his creations. Although this happens at least three times throughout the play, no hint is ever given as to its meaning. Other situations arise that are totally unverified also. Goldberg, shortly after Stan's breakdown, seems to undergo a kind of collapse himself. As he extemporizes about his philosophy of life, saying "Follow the line, the line, McCann, and you can't go wrong" (77), he lapses into vagueness and desperation:

And you'll find -- that what I say is true.
 Because I believe that the world . . . (Vacant.)
 Because I believe that the world . . . (Desperate.)
 BECAUSE I BELIEVE THAT THE WORLD . . . (Lost.)
 (78)

He is revived, however, by a strange ritualistic ceremony, in which McCann blows into his mouth, giving him a kind of 'breath of life' treatment.

The numerous possibilities concerning who or what Goldberg and

McCann are reflected in a poem by Pinter called "A View of the Party", written in 1958. Here it becomes clear that the two visitors can be regarded simply as states of mind. The title of the poem implies that any interpretation of the play is simply another "view of the party", a different perspective, and not a definitive statement:

i

The thought that Goldberg was
A man she might have known
Never crossed Meg's words
That morning in the room.

The thought that Goldberg was
A man another knew
Never crossed her eyes
When, glad, she welcomed him.

The thought that Goldberg was
A man to dread and know
Jarred Stanley in the blood
When, still, he heard his name.

While Petey knew, not then,
But later, when the light
Full up upon their scene,
He looked into the room.

And by morning Petey saw
The light begin to dim
(That daylight full of sun)
Though nothing could be done.

ii

Nat Goldberg, who arrived
With a smile on every face,
Accompanied by McCann,
Set a change upon the place.

The thought that Goldberg was
Sat in the centre of the room.
A man of weight and time,
To supervise the game.

The thought that was McCann
Walked in upon this feast,
A man of skin and bone,
With a green stain on his chest.

Allied in their theme,
They imposed upon the room
A dislocation and doom,
Though Meg saw nothing done.

The party they began,
To hail the birthday in,
Was generous and affable,
Though Stanley sat alone.

The toasts were said and sung,
All spoke of other years,
Lulu, on Goldberg's breast,
Looked up into his eyes.

And Stanley sat -- alone,
A man he might have known,
Triumphant on his hearth,
Which never was his own.

For Stanley had no home.
Only where Goldberg was,
And his bloodhound McCann,
Did Stanley remember his name.

They played at blind man's buff,
Blindfold the game was run,
McCann tracked Stanley down,
The darkness down and gone

Found the game lost and won,
Meg, all memory gone.
Lulu's lovenight spent,
Petey impotent;

A man they never knew
In the centre of the room,
And Stanley's final eyes
Broken by McCann.¹²

The light this poem sheds on The Birthday Party is clear. Consideration of stage characters simply as real people is not adequate for an understanding of the breadth of Pinter's dramatic vision. The play, as well as the poem, shows that Pinter can portray states of mind or of being as characters while still presenting sympathetic human figures on the stage. It is the technique of non-verification that allows the artist to range

freely from level to level in this manner.

It is also interesting to note that Pinter frames The Birthday Party with a type of non-verification that is as much a part of Meg's personality as it is a dramatic device. It involves Meg's tendency to make what seem to be very straightforward and direct comments and then undercut her own credibility by repetition. An instance of this occurs very early in the play, perhaps setting the tone of non-verification and mood of distrust. In a minor way, Meg's statements also pinpoint the theme of verification as it appears in some later works, by presenting an image of the person who makes things absolutely true by convincing himself that they are so. Significantly, the play closes with this sort of remark, as Meg recalls the birthday party she so enjoyed:

MEG. I was the belle of the ball.

PETEY. Were you?

MEG. Oh yes. They all said I was.

PETEY. I bet you were, too.

MEG. Oh it's true. I was.

Pause.

I know I was.

Curtain

(87)

3. The Dumb Waiter

With The Dumb Waiter, also written in 1957, we move further into Pinter's concept of the technique of non-verification and its relation to the theme of verification. Here again Pinter is concerned with presenting not answers but possibilities. Once again the outcome of the play is left in doubt, but the progression of elements towards that outcome is much clearer here than in The Room. Here, technique, inasmuch as it is concerned with non-verification, is closely related to theme, and is not just used to

create atmosphere. As in The Birthday Party, the technique of The Dumb Waiter is firmly tied to character. But in a sense, The Dumb Waiter goes beyond The Birthday Party in that it first begins to enunciate the theme of verification by suggesting the possible result of too much prying after certainty. In The Room the atmosphere of uncertainty and menace becomes the theme of the play since, in spite of its steady development, it lacks a substantial thematic trend. In The Dumb Waiter, it is not simply that atmosphere produced by technique becomes theme, but rather that the technique announces the theme of the play. The ending, at which the possibility of Ben murdering Gus is presented but not verified, is in accordance with the rest of the play, where possibilities are presented and examined -- mainly by Gus -- but are never verified. Somewhat like Aston in The Caretaker, Gus talks too much, asks too many revealing questions, and speculates too often on the true facts of his (and Ben's) situation. One could say that Pinter presents the possibility of one possible outcome of this trend.

The Dumb Waiter focuses on two hired killers who are waiting in a room for their victim to arrive. It becomes apparent early in the play that Ben dominates Gus; later it is explicitly stated that Ben is the "senior partner" (48). But even from the first scene Gus is a thorn in Ben's side as he wanders around the room in an itinerant quest for comfort. Ben's attempt to read the newspaper is continually foiled by Gus's noisy ramblings. And it is also not long before Gus's dissatisfaction with his job and his surroundings becomes apparent. He complains that the toilet doesn't work properly, that the bed was uncomfortable, and that the room has no window. Gus's complaints are directed against Wilson,

their superior, who, he says "doesn't seem to bother much about our comfort these days" (41). But Gus also directly questions Ben's leadership, asking:

GUS. Why did you stop the car this morning, in the middle of that road?

BEN (lowering the paper). I thought you were asleep.

GUS. I was, but I woke up when you stopped. You did stop, didn't you?

Pause.

In the middle of that road. It was still dark, don't you remember? I looked out. It was all misty. I thought perhaps you wanted to kip, but you were sitting up dead straight, like you were waiting for something.

BEN. I wasn't waiting for anything.

GUS. I must have fallen asleep again. What was all that about then? Why did you stop?

BEN (picking up the paper). We were too early.

GUS. Early? (He rises.) What do you mean? We got the call, didn't we, saying we were to start right away. We did. We shoved out on the dot. So how could we be too early?

BEN (quietly). Who took the call, me or you?

GUS. You.

BEN. We were too early.

GUS. Too early for what?

Pause.

(41-42)

As the play progresses the tension between Gus and Ben increases until Ben reacts against Gus's constant inquiries and comments, saying:

What's the matter with you? You're always asking me questions. What's the matter with you?

GUS. Nothing.

BEN. You never used to ask me so many damn questions. What's come over you?

GUS. No, I was just wondering.

BEN. Stop wondering. You've got a job to do. Why don't you just do it and shut up?

(49)

Nonetheless Gus continues to complain about the poor quality of this room in which they are expected to stay. He believes that Wilson, their boss, owns the place but does not even bother to provide "enough gas for a cup of tea" (51). The focal point of the problem emerges as Gus says "(thoughtfully). I find him hard to talk to, Wilson. Do you

know that, Ben?" (51) Ben simply tells Gus to "Scrub round it" (52) but Gus continues:

There are a number of things I want to ask him. But I can never get round to it, when I see him. (52)

Gus is, in effect, revolting against the organization he works for by questioning. His questions do not need answers -- what is important is that he is striving for knowledge against an organization that deals in silence, and for certainty in a world of ambiguities and half-truths. He becomes concerned, after the dumb-waiter begins to operate, with who owns the restaurant that must be above, since orders for food keep arriving. Ben explains in his own way, saying:

BEN. [. . .] They change hands overnight, these places. Go into liquidation. The people who run it, you know, they don't find it a going concern, they move out.
GUS. You mean the people who ran this place didn't find it a going concern and moved out?
BEN. Sure.
GUS. WELL, WHO'S GOT IT NOW?
Silence.

(54)

Gus's questions continue as he ponders the problem. When he realizes that the three ring burner in the kitchen would hardly be adequate for a restaurant, he wonders "what happens when we're not here?" (57) and, now perplexed, he fails to show the proper deference to the powers above when he responds to their orders by shouting up the speaking tube "The larder's bare!" (61). After the voice in the tube has commented that all the food Ben and Gus scrounged to send up was ruined or stale, Gus is angry.

We send him up all we've got and he's not satisfied. No, honest, it's enough to make the cat laugh. Why did you sent him up all that stuff? (Thoughtfully.) Why did I send it up? (63)

Later, when Ben tells Gus to be quiet so that he can give instructions

about how the "job" will be undertaken, Gus responds again with a question. "What for?" he says, "We always do it the same way, don't we?" (64) The logic of the argument is lost on Ben who never questions but simply follows orders faithfully. Suddenly, after the instructions have been given, Gus stumbles on a realization. He remembers the matches that were mysteriously pushed under the door. He recalls that although there is no gas for the burners the voice on the speaking tube wanted tea. Putting all this together and presumably thinking of Wilson, he comes up with yet another question which he asks "(Slowly in a low, tense voice.) Why did he send us matches if he knew there was no gas?" (67) He repeats the question but gets no answer from Ben. Then he experiences a further illumination, saying "(thickly). Who is it upstairs?" (67) Gus seems to have connected Wilson (since he believes that Wilson owns the house) to the powers that control the dumb-waiter. The question unnerves Ben who answers: "What's one thing to do with another?" (67) At this Gus becomes feverishly excited saying: "I told you before who owned this place, didn't I? I told you" (68), and although Ben "hits him viciously" (68) he continues:

(Violently.) Well, what's he playing all these games for? That's what I want to know. What's he doing it for? (68)

After this outburst Gus goes off again to the washroom. The speaking tube whistles and Ben receives instructions regarding the approach of the victim. He calls to Gus and the lavatory is heard flushing. Then Gus "stumbles in" (71), his clothes disheveled. Surprisingly, he enters not through the lavatory door, but through the door on the opposite side of the stage. Ben has his gun levelled at him and the curtain drops as "They

stare at each other" (71). The end of the play in this suspension of action is a refusal to clarify the outcome which thus avoids the violent melodrama of the end of The Room. It also serves another purpose since it increases the dramatic force of The Dumb Waiter by ensuring that the element of suspense is woven into the play as an integral part of it, even to the final moment.

The problems of non-verification raised by The Dumb Waiter are not so insoluble as those of The Room, although the identity of the operator of the dumb-waiter, and whether or not Gus is eliminated remain a mystery. One can speculate about these problems in much the same way that Gus speculates about his situation and, no doubt, with much the same result. Thus, in this play, Pinter begins to approach the theme of verification that occupies him so intensely in later works. Gus is concerned with this problem. He desires to know more about the organization he works for -- for instance, who comes in after them to clean up. Unlike Ben, he does not follow orders without question, but is beginning to ponder the whys and wherefores of his situation. Like Aston in The Caretaker, Gus's talkativeness proves to be his downfall.

This, of course, is only one aspect of a play that presents the working out of rising tensions between two workmates and alternates menace with comedy to provide considerable dramatic force. Nonetheless, in view of the approach of this study, it is an important aspect that sheds some light on Pinter's art. The Dumb Waiter allies the non-verification technique with the major concern of one of its characters -- Gus's concern for the facts about the situation he finds himself in. Later plays also move in this direction, in which the technique of non-verification is

firmly tied to the theme of verification, whether that theme is expressed through the concerns of one of the characters, or through the points of view from which the play is presented.

III

NON-VERIFICATION AND VERIFICATION

The Dumb Waiter reveals one of the ways in which Pinter combines the technique of non-verification with the theme of verification. Unverified elements of The Dumb Waiter abound, yet within that unknowable structure a character seeks to know. This pattern, in which a particular character engages in a quest for verified truth, is common to a number of Pinter's plays (and, indeed, to most drama). In each case however, Pinter approaches the problem of verification in a slightly different way, adding something here and subtracting it there. The most straightforward play of this pattern is also the one that is the most climactic in terms of Pinter's realizations about verification and the possibilities of ever verifying a fact. The Collection dramatizes one man's attempt to discover the truth about a particular situation. The play's title refers not only to the collection of Chinese pots that one of the characters owns, or to the collection of dresses shown at the dress-designers convention in Leeds, but also to the collection of lies, ambiguities, half-truths and possibilities that the play hints at as it depicts the search for truth. Needless to say, truth is not available.

Other plays that follow the pattern of a quest for verification are A Slight Ache and The Lover. In A Slight Ache the analogous problems of identity and self-examination are linked with the problem of verification in a play that also utilizes the device of role-reversal. Roles are

important again in The Lover when Pinter explores the nature of multiple personalities who fear that their various roles will overlap and thus destroy their own distinct and carefully cultivated reality.

The Caretaker, though it does not deal primarily with a verification quest (although a case could be made for Mick as quester), does focus on a particular character who by his very existence and personality enunciates the problem of verification. Davies, as the focal point of the play, becomes the objective correlative of the difficulties of verification since facts for him are simply tools with which to bend truth.

Another approach which Pinter uses to explore the difficult problem of verification emphasizes perspective or point of view. In Tea Party there are essentially two points of view: through the eyes of the main character, Robert Disson, or through the eyes of some impersonal observer. William Blake's aphorism "The Eye altering, alters all"¹ defines Disson's problems. Through his eyes, the perceptions of which are altered by his mind, the view is of another level of reality, another world. Thus, the difficulties of verification are increased.

Finally, Pinter utilizes structural approaches to delve into the problem of verification. The Basement takes up the device of role-reversal from A Slight Ache and uses it to frame the action of the play. The implication of the structure or framework, since it transforms the play into a cycle in which one element is varied with each round, is that reality is formed not of an absolute, unvarying combination of people and events, but rather of all the possible combinations of things. The ramifications of this approach for those who desire verification are evident. Pirandello appears to reach similar conclusions in Right You Are (If You Think So)

which deals, within a realistic, almost "well-made" framework with a situation in which, after round upon round is followed, truth is no nearer. The play contains similarities also to The Lover, especially in one character's description of the fantasy world created by two others.

She has created for him, or he for her, a world of fancy which has all the earmarks of reality itself, and in this fictitious reality they get along perfectly well, and in full accord with each other; and this world of fancy, this reality of theirs, no document can possibly destroy because the air they breathe is of that world. For them it is something they can see with their eyes, hear with their ears, touch with their fingers.²

The effects of Pinter's non-verification technique are not found only in The Room, The Birthday Party and The Dumb Waiter. Rather, I have chosen to study these early plays primarily in terms of this technique in order both to provide sufficient background for the study of other plays and in order to deal fairly with these early plays that rely so heavily on technique alone. Pinter's technique of non-verification became his hallmark in the early plays; later he continued to use the technique but to much greater advantage by linking it with the very heart of his plays -- the theme. Non-verification alone is effective in implying the necessity for questioning the basis of truth and reality. Continued exposure to unverified forces or characters conditions the audience first to question in search of answers or interpretations for the problems, then to question the efficacy of questioning.³ Pinter's later approaches to the problem of verification also engender this kind of response, but far more effectively. Here the technique of non-verification is an integral part of the characterization, the dialogue, the theme and the very structure of the play. Non-verification is the foundation of reality in a Pinter play. His characters work within this basis (as does Davies in The Caretaker), or

attempt to revolt against this groundwork (as do Edward in A Slight Ache and James in The Collection). Whatever Pinter's approach to verification or to the nature of reality, be it the question of perceptive problems, multiple roles, or the concept of layered reality, the approach is closely linked to the technique of non-verification, which utilizes unverified situations, events, characters and forces. This fact is evident in all of Pinter's plays.

IV

THE CARETAKER

In The Caretaker Pinter links non-verification with verification by creating a character, an old tramp whose personality and identity are totally unverifiable, and who thus can be regarded as the objective correlative of the problem of verification in the modern world. This character is variously called Davies, Jenkins or MacDavies and is responsible for weaving an aura of fantasy in The Caretaker that eventually blurs the distinction between what is true and what false. Davies fits the mold that Pinter cast in his program note exactly.¹ He carries no identity card to prove who he is -- indeed he brings no papers at all -- and he actually has no legal identity. His one desire, or so he claims, is to "get down to Sidcup" (19) where he has left the papers that prove who he is. He explains:

A man I know has got them. I left them with him. You see? They prove who I am! I can't move without them papers. They tell you who I am. You see! I'm stuck without them. (20)

Even Davies' legal proof of identity comes to be questioned later in the play, however. Although he claims that his papers are in Sidcup, it soon becomes apparent in fact that Davies' supply of documents is as vast as his web of half-truths. He explains later that he has been using an assumed name for some time and that his unemployment insurance card carries this assumed name rather than his legal one.

Of course I got plenty of other cards lying about, but they don't know that, and I can't tell them, can I, because then they'd find out I was going about under an assumed name. You see, the name I call myself now, that's not my real name. My real name's not the one I'm using, you see. It's different. You see, the name I go under now ain't my real one. It's assumed. (44)

Thus, in this very basic question of identity, the old man presents an ambiguous and totally unverifiable face to the world.

By creating the character of Davies, Pinter explores the theme of verification with the old man's every word and motion. Legally, there is no proof of his existence. Socially, the man is a self-righteous and indignant hypocrite who bends the facts at hand to suit his purposes. He explains that he changed his name "years ago" (20) but gives no reason for the change. This is the unverified and unverifiable basis for his existence. His every word is a distortion of what society commonly calls truth. His motives are strictly personal and every motion that he makes is dedicated to his own ends. In this play Pinter appears to accept his own dictum that an unverified character is "as legitimate and as worthy of attention" as one about whom everything is known. Davies, hidden within the expansive veil of lies and half-truths that he weaves throughout the play, is indeed its focal point.

The aura of untruth that hangs around Davies is created by Pinter in various ways. Aston, the older brother, is the most apparently honest character in the play. His naiveté and slow but forthright manner is said by him to be the result of a brain operation or electric shock treatment that he underwent in the past. The operation affected his mind:

The trouble was . . . my thoughts . . . had become very slow . . . I couldn't think at all . . . I couldn't . . . get . . . my thoughts . . . together . . . uuuhh . . . I could . . . never quite get it . . . together. (57)

Nonetheless, in spite of Aston's disability, and in spite of the ease with which Davies appears to take him in, it is often he who points up the contrast between Davies' version of a story and another version. For instance, when Aston and Davies have just arrived on the scene as the play opens, Davies complains at length about the "Greeks", "Poles" and "Blacks", and "all them aliens" (8) who treated him so harshly at the café where Aston has just rescued him from a fray. Davies acts indignant and tough, obviously embellishing his story of the fight:

When he comes at me tonight I told him. Didn't I?
You heard me tell him, didn't you? (8)

But Aston, slow as he may be, knows what he saw:

ASTON. I saw him have a go at you.
DAVIES. Go at me? You wouldn't grumble. The filthy skaté,
an old man like me, I've had dinner with the best.
Pause.
ASTON. Yes, I saw him have a go at you. (9)

These contrasts between what Davies says he saw, heard or did, and another more reliable character's version of the same story are continually being made. Dramatically, their effect is to promote distrust and suspicion of Davies in the eyes of the audience. The varying stories awaken the audience very quickly both to an understanding of Davies' character and to comprehension of the theme of the play, which is the vagueness and obscurity of truth in relation to Davies' character. Davies' own versions of stories are also continually changing. At first he claims that the reason for the fracas was that he was told to take out a bucket of rubbish, a piece of work that he felt was not his responsibility. Then he changes his tactics, and dwells on the personal affront he felt, saying:

Yes, well say I had! Even if I had! Even if I was
supposed to take out the bucket, who was this git to
come up and give me orders? We got the same standing.

He's not my boss. He's nothing superior to me. (9-10)

Later, when he has had a run-in with Mick, Aston's younger brother who claims that he owns the old house that Aston is supposed to be working on, Davies again changes his story (this time in terms of his stated opinions) in order to drift with what he sees as the prevailing winds of truth. Mick and Davies carry on a very ambiguous relationship throughout the play, with Mick's attitude toward the old man rapidly changing from hostility to friendliness and back. It is almost as if Mick recognizes what type of character he is dealing with in Davies, and makes himself a kind of mirror of the old man's unreliability. At one point, Mick dons the mask of friendship for Davies, and leads the conversation around to his older brother. He confesses to Davies, as if in a very intimate tone, that Aston's trouble is that "He doesn't like work" (48). By means of this confidence Mick draws Davies out and leads him to express his own opinions about Aston:

MICK. He's supposed to be doing a little job for me . . . I keep him here to do a little job . . . but I don't know . . . I'm coming to the conclusion that he's a slow worker.

Pause.

What would your advice be?

DAVIES. Well . . . he's a funny bloke, your brother.

MICK. What?

DAVIES. I was saying, he's . . . he's a bit of a funny bloke, your brother.

MICK stares at him.

MICK. Funny? Why?

DAVIES. Well . . . he's funny . . .

MICK. What's funny about him?

Pause.

DAVIES. Not liking work.

MICK. What's funny about that?

DAVIES. Nothing.

Pause.

MICK. I don't call it funny.

DAVIES. Nor me.

Pinter's manipulation of the relationship between Mick and Davies is such that it serves to heighten awareness of the aura of untruth that Davies produces. Each encounter between them clarifies more and more sharply the hazy outline that encompasses Davies' aura. Each encounter reveals Davies shaping the truth to his own ends. Almost invariably, these confrontations reveal that Davies' version of the truth takes its impetus either from his own self-righteous indignation or from simple expedience, rather than from the actual facts of the matter.

Moreover, Davies for some reason appears to fear what is factually substantial and direct. His vagueness and hesitant manner of speaking also dramatize his essential hypocrisy. Every aspect of his character seems calculated to arouse distrust and thus adds to the aura of untruth that hangs around him. His remembrance of dates and times is foggy and hardly inspires confidence in the truth of his stories. Sidcup is his goal, for only by clearing up his legal identity problem does Davies feel that he has a chance in the world. No doubt Sidcup will go on being Davies' goal all his life, but nonetheless, he elaborates on this theme repeatedly and "with great feeling" (19).

If only I could get down to Sidcup! I've been waiting for the weather to break. He's got my papers, this man I left them with, it's got it all down there, I could prove everything. (20)

But when Aston asks for a simple direct statement of fact, saying "How long's he had them?" (20), Davies immediately wavers in the face of reality.

DAVIES. What?

ASTON. How long's he had them?

DAVIES. Oh, must be . . . it was in the war . . . must be . . . about near on fifteen year ago.

(21)

Here Davies appears to have withstood the fearful floodwaters of a direct question by presenting, finally, an answer. At other moments, dealing with other questions (questions that would appear to us to be easier to answer), Davies' dam collapses, and releases a muddy flood of hesitation, vagueness and evasion:

ASTON. What did you say your name was?
 DAVIES. Bernard Jenkins is my assumed one.
 ASTON. No, your other one?
 DAVIES. Davies. Mac Davies.
 ASTON. Welsh, are you?
 DAVIES. Eh?
 ASTON. You Welsh?
 Pause.
 DAVIES. Well, I been around, you know . . . what I mean . . .
 I been about
 ASTON. Where were you born then?
 DAVIES (darkly). What do you mean?
 ASTON. Where were you born?
 DAVIES. I was . . . uh . . . oh, it's a bit hard, like, to set
 your mind back . . . see what I mean . . . going back . . .
 a good way . . . lose a bit of track, like . . . you know

(25)

Whether Davies simply cannot remember his origin, does not wish to remember, or does not want to reveal the place of his birth is not important. He may be like Stanley, full of what appear to be paranoid but grandiose delusions about the past. Or he may have some dark secret that he does not wish to reveal. But why he is so vague and hesitant in dealing with a simple question does not matter. What is important is the dramatic effect of this mode of presentation. Pinter is very carefully drawing Davies as a character around whom there is no solid fact, no substantial identity except his present intolerance and indignation, and no verifiable truth. In this sense Davies is the image of the difficulty of obtaining the valuable commodity of truth in our modern world.

Mick is the only character in the play who seems to understand

Davies. From the beginning Mick treats him ambiguously, alternating between attacking the old man and befriending him. Act one opens with a silent view of Mick sitting in the room. He moves off as he hears Aston and Davies approaching. From this the assumption that Mick is in a position to overhear Davies and Aston during the first act seems valid. This is substantiated later, since he appears suddenly near the end of the act (after Aston has left) and forces Davies to the floor, questioning him: "What's the game?" (29) His treatment of Davies in the early moments of Act two shows that he understands with whom he is dealing, and Pinter's techniques of repetition of questions and the incredible monologues he puts into Mick's mouth, show that he desires to point up both Davies' character and Mick's understanding of it. Mick repeats the question "What's your name?" at least four times, and asks a comparable number of other questions concerning the night Davies has spent in the house. The questions come again and again, faster and faster, until both Mick and Davies are shouting and until Davies finally seems to weaken.

MICK. [. . .] Did you sleep here last night?

DAVIES. Yes.

MICK. Sleep well?

DAVIES. Yes!

MICK. Did you have to get up in the night?

DAVIES. No!

Pause.

MICK. What's your name?

DAVIES (shifting, about to rise). Now look here!

MICK. What?

DAVIES. Jenkins!

MICK. Jen . . . kins.

DAVIES makes a sudden move to rise. A violent bellow from MICK sends him back.

(A shout.) Sleep here last night?

DAVIES. Yes

MICK (continuing at great pace). How'd you sleep?

DAVIES. I slept--

MICK. Sleep well?

DAVIES. Now look--
 MICK. What bed?
 DAVIES. That--
 MICK. Not the other?
 DAVIES. No!
 MICK. Choosy.

Pause.

(32-3)

Mick's violent interrogation of Davies, using the same questions over and over, implies that he understands that truth is not easily available from the old man. When Davies finally breaks down and tells Mick the truth -- at least about how he came to be in that room -- it is ironic that Mick should appear not to believe him. "Fibber" he says. "I'm afraid you're a born fibber, en't you?" (34) Thus Pinter explores the nature of Davies' character. As the relationship between the three characters becomes more and more complex, and as Davies worms his way into favor with each of the brothers, continually trying to set them against each other, we see exactly what comprises Davies' nature.

As the play progresses it becomes apparent that Davies wants to throw his lot in with whichever brother runs the house. When Aston offers him the job of caretaker, Davies hesitates before accepting. His response is characteristic of the cloudy vagueness and lack of definition that surround him:

DAVIES. Well, I . . . I never done caretaking before, you know . . . I mean to say . . . I never . . . what I mean to say is . . . I never been a caretaker before.

Pause.

ASTON. How do you feel about being one, then?
 DAVIES. Well, I reckon . . . Well, I'd have to know . . . you know . . .

ASTON. What sort of

DAVIES. Yes, what sort of . . . you know

Pause.

ASTON. Well, I mean

DAVIES. I mean, I'd have to . . . I'd have to

ASTON. Well, I could tell you

DAVIES. That's . . . that's it . . . you see . . . you get my meaning?

ASTON. When the time comes

DAVIES. I mean, that's what I'm getting at, you see

ASTON. More or less exactly what you

DAVIES. You see, what I mean to say . . . what I'm getting at is . . . I mean, what sort of jobs

Pause.

(42-3)

Later, however, when Davies has had time to assimilate the fact that he will probably be required to do very little as caretaker of the house, he responds rather differently to Mick's offer of the same job. His immediate concern at this point is to discover who exactly runs the place.

DAVIES. Yes, well . . . look . . . listen . . . who's the landlord here, him or you?

MICK. Me. I am. I got deeds to prove it.

DAVIES. Ah. . . (Decisively.) Well listen, I don't mind doing a bit of caretaking, I wouldn't mind looking after the place for you.

(51)

The breakdown of relations between Davies and Aston is a result of Davies' desire for increased control in the affairs of the room. He complains bitterly to Mick about Aston's conduct and bewails the fact that he has no knife or clock. Slowly the idea forms in Davies mind that if he can get rid of Aston he will have the house to himself, since Mick lives elsewhere. Davies finally alienates himself from Aston completely when he reminds him of his sojourn in the mental hospital and when he mocks his ability to build the shed that the older brother feels must be his first accomplishment before he can do anything else. At this Aston tells Davies to leave. There is considerable irony in Davies' parting remark, as he exclaims "Now I know who I can trust" (69). The irony is double-edged -- not only is it ironic that it should be Davies who would

talk about trust, of all things, but, in fact, Davies is wrong in trusting Mick.

The climax of the play arrives quickly in the next scene when this becomes apparent. Davies presents his case to Mick, whom he is sure will back him, only to find that Mick stands behind his brother. The theme of verification is sounded a number of times at this point as Mick correctly characterizes Davies as "a bloody imposter" who has been presenting a "false impression" (72) of himself. Once again we return thematically to the interrogation scene as Mick asks Davies "What is your name?" (72):

DAVIES. Don't start that--
MICK. No, what's your real name?
DAVIES. My real name's Davies.
MICK. What's the name you go under?
DAVIES. Jenkins!
MICK. You got two names. What about the rest? Eh?

(73)

Finally the keynote comes straight to the surface in what could be a description of many of Pinter's characters. Mick cuts Davies to size saying:

What a strange man you are. Aren't you? You're really strange. Ever since you come into this house there's been nothing but trouble. Honest. I can take nothing you say at face value. Every word you speak is open to any number of different interpretations. Most of what you say is lies. You're violent, you're erratic, you're just completely unpredictable. (73)

Then, although Davies attempts to worm his way back into Aston's favor, he fails. Aston refuses to listen to Davies' pleas, saying that he will be busy building his shed and restating in his own simple way what Mick has just said to Davies. "You make too much noise" (77) he says. Davies is reduced to the fearful hesitancy that was so characteristic of him earlier in the play. His favorite theme once again becomes his one goal,

his one touchstone of identity and purpose:

Listen . . . if I . . . got down . . . if I was to . . .
 get my papers . . . would you . . . would you let . . .
 would you . . . if I got down . . . and got my . . .

Long silence.

Curtain.

(78)

The argument that Davies is an image of the problem of verification can be extended to show that Mick, also, fills the requirements. Mick appears as a reflection of what Davies is, apparently so that he will be able to cope with the old man's lies. Ironically, almost all of Mick's accusations against Davies could be made against Mick as well, for he is also an unverified element in the play. Moreover, the fact that we know little of Mick's hidden motives is due not simply to his nature but presumably also to his own conscious design. Thus, The Caretaker attacks the problem of verification not so much by depicting a futile quest for certainty, but rather by presenting characters whose very existence and whose mere presence dramatically invokes the necessity of grappling with the difficulties of verification.

It is always interesting to compare statements made by Pinter to those made by characters in his plays. When Mick charges Davies with being a liar and says: "Every word you speak is open to any number of different interpretations" (73), the thought expressed is quite similar to what Pinter once said, in an essay called "Writing for the Theatre".

I'm speaking with some reluctance, knowing that there are at least twenty-four possible aspects of any single statement, depending on where you're standing at the time or on what the weather is like. A categorical statement, I find, will never stay where it is and be finite. It will immediately be subject to modification by the other twenty-three possibilities of it. No statement I make, therefore, should be interpreted as final.

and definitive. One or two of them may sound final and definitive, they may even be almost final and definitive, but I won't regard them as such tomorrow, and I wouldn't like you to do so today.²

The point is that there are only possibilities, no absolutes, in terms of what is normally thought of as truth. In the case of Davies and Mick the possibilities are so numerous that there is no chance of verification -- we can never be absolutely sure who or what they are, except by what their present actions reveal. In a sense, this makes Pinter into an existential playwright, since it is essentially the realization that man is defined (so far as he can ever be said to be defined) only by the present moment and circumstance.³ We cannot pin Davies down, ever, except to realize that he will never be pinned down. In this way, Davies as a character is an image or a metaphor of the impossibility of verification in the modern world. Mick, insofar as he also molds himself to the necessities of the situation and never reveals his true character, also fits this category. To a lesser extent, this argument can be extended to Aston as well, for the truth about his background is never clearly revealed and his slow reactions to things tend to make him a mysterious character too. Pinter himself cautions us with regard to Aston's apparent honesty, saying "it isn't necessary to conclude that everything Aston says about his experiences in the mental hospital is true."⁴

Thus, The Caretaker attacks the problem of verification through its characters. Its dramatic effectiveness is a function of the strength of the hazy cloud of untruth that hangs around Davies, a cloud which Mick reflects and which surrounds Aston as well. The Caretaker is a fine play for the reason (among other things) that theme, characters, and atmosphere are almost indivisible -- the three elements cannot be separated.

V

A SLIGHT ACHE

A Slight Ache, first written as a radio play in 1958, combines the concept of a quest for verification with a character who, like Davies, is an objective correlative of the problems of verification. The matchseller in A Slight Ache is the epitome of the technique of non-verification since he remains totally silent throughout the play. On radio, he qualifies as the presentation of a complete void as a character because his very existence must be questioned. On stage, the matchseller must be visually characterized, and thus loses some of the inherent mystery that the radio play's presentation of a void creates.¹ Nonetheless, the matchseller is the open centre around which A Slight Ache revolves.² He is a reflection or a projection of Edward and Flora's deepest needs and desires, and his presence, though silent, is the dramatic catalyst that initiates all the progress of the play.

Pinter's use of a completely silent figure in this manner implies that unverified characters are important forces in his drama. In terms of verification A Slight Ache presents Edward's attempt to uncover the truth about the matchseller and his resultant discoveries about himself. Flora also discovers a latent part of her own psyche through the matchseller's presence. The play introduces a number of themes: a quest for verification which becomes a quest or a struggle for identity, a breakdown (induced in the beginning by the slight ache in Edward's eyes), and a role-

reversal between Edward and the matchseller. All these themes are related to the concept of verification. In this regard, Edward's identity quest is an attempt to define or verify himself that arises from his attempt to verify his suspicions about the matchseller. In a sense, this quest becomes a struggle between Edward and the matchseller. The matchseller, as a total void, has no identity, and leeches what little Edward has away from him. The breakdown of Edward's perceptive abilities is also related to the concept of verification in that failures of perception are often linked to the psychological collapse which in Pinter's drama seems to be the final end of most attempts at verification. This theme is further developed in Tea Party.

Role-reversal is a technique which implies the importance of the concept of verification in that it presents the possibility of the interchangeability of roles, characters or personalities. Thus, the absolute reality of any personality or role is to be questioned since it is only part of a flux that is constant. Verification under these circumstances is impossible.

Edward's quest for verification of the matchseller's identity and purpose is the main theme of the play and leads directly to his breakdown when he discovers in the process what he himself is (or is not). On one level, Edward meets himself in the figure of the matchseller (who can be considered a kind of '*Doppelgänger*') and is thus stricken. Whether his final collapse and relegation to the silent void formerly occupied by the matchseller is due to the failure of his quest to find his true identity, or whether it is due to his horror at the perception of what he really is matters little. The main issue is that Pinter is exploring the concept

of an identity struggle or quest by linking it to the theme of verification. The threat to Edward's sense of self-definition is provided by the unverified and unverifiable force that is the matchseller.

Flora, on the other hand, is stimulated to a reawakened awareness of her still vital sexuality by the matchseller. Where Edward is destroyed by his realizations (whatever their nature), Flora is reborn in desire. The matchseller therefore acts as a catalyst for both of the other characters in the play. Flora and Edward are goaded towards whatever is already within themselves by the silent void that is the old man. The irresistible unverified void brings something for everyone.

Pinter's matchseller therefore, is the unverified force that provides the play's impetus. Although he can be regarded simply as a dramatic reflection or projection of Edward and Flora's subconscious needs, desires and lacks, it is also valuable to realize that, essentially, his unverified nature is what makes him effective. It is the lack of definition that the matchseller embodies that sets Flora and Edward on their paths. The matchseller is the epitome of Pinter's realization that characters need not be verified, and as an unverified force -- in fact as the force of non-verification -- he not only provides the dramatic impetus that moves the play, but also introduces the richness of ambiguity and the largesse of numerous possibilities to the play. It is through the matchseller's silence that the play moves towards other themes, the quest for verification and identity by Edward, the quest for sexual reassertion by Flora, and the ultimate role-reversal.

The theme of verification is hinted at throughout the play but only infrequently rises directly to the surface. Most often it is implied

by the direction of Edward's thoughts and aspirations, though the question of Flora's true identity also raises it. It is not clear whether Edward realizes as he speaks to the matchseller that he has described his wife and the squire's daughter of his youth in exactly the same terms. He also characterizes the daughter, whom he calls Fanny, as a flower, which calls to mind Flora's name. But the real leap into the problem of verification in terms of Flora's identity comes with Edward's reaction to his own thoughts, as he draws a parallel between Fanny, the squire's daughter, and the matchseller himself. He says to the matchseller:

You're no more disgusting than Fanny, the squire's daughter, after all. In appearance you differ but not in essence. There's the same . . .

Pause.

The same . . .

Pause.

(27)

Edward's hesitation and inability to finish expressing his thought, coupled with the later development that links Flora with the matchseller (that is, her remembrance of the rape) suggests that the problem of his wife's identity is one of the questions for which Edward feels the need for a verified answer, which he fails to obtain.

The play opens with the couple's conversation about the flowers in their garden, the types and locations of which they disagree about. The realization that Edward has avoided all his life what seems to be a major human duty -- that of attempting to verify all things around him -- becomes clear when the argument reaches its climax and ends abruptly in a vague pause. Edward haughtily excuses his ignorance of the garden, saying:

I don't see why I should be expected to distinguish
between those plants. It's not my job.
FLORA. You know perfectly well what grows in your garden.
EDWARD. Quite the contrary. It is clear that I don't.

Pause.

(10)

Perhaps it is Edward's theoretical bent that has kept him from assuming the responsibility of attempting to verify things -- he vaguely states later that he has "been engaged [on a treatise] on the dimensionality and continuity of space . . . and time . . . for years" (17). Apparently, Edward's tryst with the abstract has been prolonged and has produced no substantial results.

After a brief but significant encounter in which Edward kills a wasp by blinding it with hot water as it is trapped in the marmalade pot, the appearance of the unverified force of the matchseller begins to drive him toward a futile quest for verification. His immediate reaction is anger as he ponders what the old man's purpose is and how long he has been standing at the back gate.

EDWARD. What in God's name is he doing with a tray full of matches at half past nine in the morning?
FLORA. He arrives at seven o'clock.
EDWARD. Seven o'clock?
FLORA. He's always there at seven.
EDWARD. Yes, but you've never . . . actually seen him arrive?
FLORA. No, I . . .
EDWARD. Well, how do you know he's . . . not been standing there all night?

Pause.

(15)

Later, after the slight ache in Edward's eyes has become worse, implying that his perceptive faculties are steadily failing, he firmly decides upon his course of action and states what he sees as the main problem:

Slowly. I want to speak to that man. I want to have a word with him.

Pause.

It's quite absurd, of course. I really can't tolerate something so . . . absurd, right on my doorstep. I shall not tolerate it.[. . .]

I haven't wasted my time. I've hit, in fact, upon the truth. He's not a matchseller at all. The bastard isn't a matchseller at all. Curious I never realized that before. He's an imposter. [. . .]

No, there is something very false about that man. I intend to get to the bottom of it. I'll soon get rid of him. He can go and ply his trade somewhere else.

(18-19)

To "get to the bottom of it" Edward invites the matchseller in and proceeds, in the face of the fellow's total silence, to talk to him. In this first encounter, Edward flaunts his social position, education and general savoir faire at the matchseller, all the while condescending to treat him as an equal. He compares himself with the squire of the village, continually drops exotic place-names, and bombards the old man³ with the offer of sophisticated drinks. When Edward finally steels himself enough to ask his question, he does so in a low voice:

I want to ask you a question. Why do you stand outside my back gate, from dawn till dusk, why do you pretend to sell matches, why . . . ? (27)

His questions are cut off when the old man begins to fall, finally giving Edward the opportunity to manoeuvre him into a chair, and breathe a great sigh of relief that the matchseller is settled. Edward mutters on for a few moments but then is overwhelmed by the matchseller's presence, saying, "I must get some air. I must get a breath of air" (27).

Edward's encounter with the unverified force of the matchseller leaves him weary and begins his psychological breakdown. Due to the man's silence, there has been absolutely no communication between the two, but

Edward nonetheless intimates to his wife that he is making progress in the interrogation:

FLORA. What's happening? How are you getting on with him?

EDWARD. Very well. We get on remarkably well. He's a little . . . reticent. Somewhat withdrawn. It's understandable. I should be the same, perhaps, in his place. Though, of course, I could not possibly find myself in his place.

FLORA. Have you found out anything about him?

EDWARD. A little. A little. He's had various trades, that's certain. His place of residence is unsure. He's . . . he's not a drinking man. As yet, I haven't discovered the reason for his arrival here. I shall in due course . . . by nightfall.

(28)

Edward's acceptance of his own mere conjectures as facts implies that, in his attempt to verify the forces of non-verification, he has been reduced to grasping at straws for realities. This is the first symptom of his breakdown, which is soon evidenced in other ways also. To begin with, Edward becomes even more paranoid, suspecting not only the matchseller but Flora as well. He scoffs at her chances of discovering the truth about the matchseller and goes on to characterize all the complex levels of the problem of verification in a short tirade that clarifies the extent to which his breakdown has progressed:

No, you're a woman, you know nothing. (Slight pause.) But he possesses other faculties. Cunning. The man's an imposter and he knows I know it.

FLORA. I'll tell you what. Look. Let me speak to him. I'll speak to him.

EDWARD (quietly). And I know he knows I know it.

FLORA. I'll find out all about him, Edward. I promise you I will.

EDWARD. And he knows I know.

(29)

When Flora continues to press her husband for a chance to talk to the matchseller, arguing "You'll see -- he won't bargain for me. I'll

surprise him. He'll . . . he'll admit everything", Edward replies softly:

He'll admit everything, will he?

FLORA. You wait and see, you just--

EDWARD (hissing). What are you plotting?

FLORA. I know exactly what I shall--

EDWARD. What are you plotting?
He seizes her arms.

FLORA. Edward, you're hurting me!
Pause.
With dignity. I shall wave from the window when I'm ready. Then you can come up. I shall get to the truth of it, I assure you. You're much too heavy-handed, in every way. You should trust your wife more, Edward. You should trust her judgement, and have a greater insight into her capabilities. A woman . . . a woman will often succeed, you know, where a man must invariably fail.

(29-30)

Flora's speech brings into clear relief both one of the main conflicts in the play (the conflict between Flora and Edward, for which the matchseller could be a symbol) and also pinpoints Edward's problem in one word -- insight. Edward's quest for verification of the matchseller's identity becomes a searching into himself, a self-examination in which only silence answers. If Edward's insight were better developed, if he had a clearer perception of his inner self, perhaps he would not be so affected by the unverified void of the matchseller. On the other hand, if the matchseller's silence implies that he is the reflection of Edward's hollow inner self (as a number of references indicate⁴), it is Edward's vague glimpse of his hollow core that destroys him.

Flora's encounter with the matchseller rapidly devolves into a blatantly sexual proposition. She recalls her "first canter unchaperoned" (31) when she was raped by a poacher whom she is reminded of by the matchseller.

Do you know, I've got a feeling I've seen you before,

somewhere. [. . .] You were much younger. Yes, I'm really sure of it. Between ourselves, were you ever a poacher? (30-31)

Flora becomes, like many other of Pinter's women, both a mother and a lover, as she mops the old man's brow with her chiffon and urges him to speak to her of love. She decides that she is going to keep him.

I'm going to keep you, you dreadful chap, and call you Barnabas. Isn't it dark, Barnabas? Your eyes, your eyes, your great big eyes. (32)

As Edward returns at this point Flora defends the matchseller by claiming that he is dying, but Edward will not listen, shouting "I'll? You lying slut. Get back to your trough!" (33) In his second encounter with the matchseller, Edward continues to speak of his youth and past life and recalls the orderly fashion in which it was arranged. His memories are couched in terms implying clearness and lucidity, which suggests both that they are attempts at self-definition and that his perceptions of himself are steadily dulling. Edward recalls that morning (when he killed the wasp with hot water) as if it were a part of his youth, which shows that his struggle to comprehend the matchseller has aged him greatly.

Ha. Yesterday now, it was clear, clearly defined, so clearly.

Pause.

The garden, too, was sharp, lucid, in the rain, in the sun.

Pause.

My den, too, was sharp, arranged for my purpose . . . quite satisfactory.

Pause.

The house too, was polished, all the banisters were polished, and the stair rods, and the curtain rods.

Pause.

My desk was polished, and my cabinet.

Pause.

I was polished. (Nostalgic.) I could stand on the hill and look through my telescope at the sea. And follow the path of the three-masted schooner, feeling fit, well aware of my sinews, their suppleness, my arms lifted holding the telescope, steady, easily, no trembling, my aim was perfect, I could pour

hot water down the spoon-hole, yes, easily, no difficulty, my grasp firm, my command established, my life was accounted for, I was ready for my excursions to the cliff, down the path to the back gate, through the long grass, no need to watch for the nettles, my progress was fluent, after my long struggling against all kinds of usurpers, disreputables, lists, literally lists of people anxious to do me down, and my reputation down, my command was established, [. . .] my progress was as sure, as fluent . . . (35-6)

The fact that the unverified and vague force of the matchseller is the disrupting influence on the clarity of Edward's life is substantiated by an earlier parallel passage, in which Edward bewails the fact that the old man is standing at his gate.

It used to give me great pleasure, such pleasure, to stroll along through the long grass, out through the back gate, pass into the lane. That pleasure is now denied me. It's my own house, isn't it? It's my own gate. (15-16)

But the possibility that the unverified force that is the matchseller originates within Edward's own head has up to this point only been vaguely hinted at. Edward's recollections of his lucid, polished youth or past flow smoothly into the next speech, from which it becomes apparent that the old man can be regarded as a projection of Edward's inner self. In answering his own question regarding his reason for inviting the matchseller in, Edward says:

Well, why not, you might say? My oldest acquaintance. My nearest and dearest. My kith and kin. (36)

The phrases suggest that Edward has in fact met himself face to face -- a variation on the 'Doppelgänger' motif. Earlier Flora had suggested that she might call the police "Or even the vicar" (20) to get rid of the old man, which also calls to mind the 'Doppelgänger' myth since it implies that the matchseller is an evil spirit. Edward goes on to recollect, just as Flora did, that he also has seen the matchseller before. He adds "In

fact every time I have seen you you have looked quite different to the time before" (37). Edward's perceptions of the matchseller (and of himself) have therefore been changing. Even as he is speaking they change. He observes at one moment that the matchseller is laughing, at the next that he is crying.

You're weeping. You're shaking with grief. For me.
I can't believe it. For my plight. (37)

Edward's perceptions go on changing after he collapses to the floor, saying "I've caught a cold. A germ. In my eyes. It was this morning. In my eyes. My eyes" (38). He explains, attempting to excuse his perceptive failures:

Not that I had any difficulty in seeing you, no, no, it was not so much my sight, my sight is excellent [.] . . no it was not so much any deficiency in my sight as the airs between me and my object [.] . . the change of air, the currents obtaining in the space between me and my object, the shades they make, the shapes they take, the quivering, the eternal quivering [.] . . nothing to do with heat haze. (38)

As Edward rambles on and his breakdown progresses he once again believes that the matchseller is laughing at him. His perceptions continue to change and he says "You look younger. You look extraordinarily . . . youthful" (39) and goes on as he becomes weaker to compare the matchseller to himself as a youth. Then, "With great, final effort [.] . . he whispers "Who are you?" (39) Edward's last question could as well be "Who am I?"

As if in answer, Flora calls out "Barnabas" at this very moment, and arrives as the role-reversal begins. Although she mentioned earlier that "It's the height of summer today" (11), she now says to the matchseller:

The summer is coming. I've put up your canopy for you. You can lunch in the garden, by the pool. I've polished the whole house for you. (40)

Thus, the matchseller has completely usurped Edward's role, and it only remains for Edward to become the unidentifiable old man. The reversal is completed and the play ends as Flora exclaims:

Yes. Oh, wait a moment.

Pause.

Edward. Here is your tray.

(40)

This reversal is connected with the theme of verification in that it implies that reality and personalities are composed of numerous levels, layers or possibilities. A character need not (and cannot) be defined in the way that a preserved butterfly is pinned down, transfixated by an absolute. Pinter's characters prove that variation and movement is possible; the interchanging of roles in fact, is almost necessary in this case, since it becomes the logical extension of Edward's breakdown. In his encounter with the void, Edward has become the void. In failing to define the matchseller (and by extension himself) with his torrent of words and faded memories, he lapses into non-entity. The attempt at verification -- self-verification in this case -- fails, since, given the nature of reality as Pinter sees it, such an attempt can never succeed. For Flora, identity is not bound to mere words, but is an uprising of feelings and desires. Where the matchseller as void swallows Edward, Flora expands to encompass the emptiness as mother-lover. Notice also that she is capable of naming the void, thus creating for it (in her own mind at least) a more substantial existence.⁵

The theme of perception is also important to Pinter's concept of the difficulties of verification. In this regard, it is understandable that Rose's end is blindness, living as she does in a world in which even the number of floors in the house is in doubt. Stanley too is

assaulted from this direction. His glasses are broken by McCann as if to symbolize his failures of perception. Here, in A Slight Ache, Edward's slight ache, which he so definitely claims is not due to a lack of sleep, expands to transmute his whole universe into the vagueness and unverifiable cloudiness of the matchseller. Edward's quest for the identity of the matchseller becomes a quest toward himself which ends either with his view of his own Kurtz-like hollowness or in his devastating realization that he is simply incapable of comprehension.

A Slight Ache is an important play in terms of this study because it links the concept of the problems of verification to the idea of an identity quest or struggle, to the device of role-reversal, and generally to the dramatic speculation that reality is not unified but rather is layered. Edward's progressive breakdown, capped by the climactic moment when he is about to change places with the matchseller, and coupled with the indefinite quality of the matchseller himself, becomes a forceful and unified dramatic statement of Pinter's realizations (be they instinctive or philosophic) about the nature of reality. Pinter's approach to reality -- his speculation that absolutes cannot exist and that reality is formed of layers or combinations of possibilities -- is, in a way, mirrored by the presentation of his art, in which organic metaphor, continually in flux and never verified, is the vehicle.⁶ It is for this reason that hide-bound interpretation must give way to recognition and acceptance of the importance of verification and non-verification in Pinter's work.

Each of the three elements so finely fused in A Slight Ache ^{is} are considered in greater detail by Pinter in other works. He utilizes the device of role-reversal as a structural element of a later television

play, The Basement. The theme of the failures of perception is explored in Tea Party. Finally, the concept of the layers of reality (objective or personal) is central to The Lover. Each of these plays reveals further aspects of Pinter's approaches to the problem of verification and reality.

VI

THE BASEMENT

The Basement, broadcast on BBC television in 1967, utilizes the device of role-reversal as a structural framework for the play. The Basement is highly compressed, mainly due to Pinter's utilization of the medium of television and the fact that the scenes portrayed are apparently random presentations. Thus, the exact nature of the story behind the scenes is impossible to clarify, and the television technique, which ignores chronology in an attempt to direct the perceptions of the viewer, adds to the mystification of the play. In terms of the interest of this study, these facts are important for a discussion of Pinter's interest in verification and non-verification. But in terms of dramatic force, The Basement seems to have too little real substance (verified or otherwise) to be very powerful.

The implication of the play is that the possible combinations of the layers of reality are limitless. Because of the framing device of role-reversal, the play is cyclic: it begins and ends with exactly the same situation, with one modification in that two of the three characters have exchanged roles. Whether the play represents a dream state (as Esslin suggests¹) or simply Pinter's vision of objective reality is of secondary importance in terms of the focus of this study. Any actual basis in reality (subjective or objective) that The Basement may have is less important than the inherent statement about reality that the play makes. The Basement's presentation of the cyclic nature of reality carries broad

implications that encompass the theme of verification by indicating that reality is not simple, one-dimensional, solid and continuous but rather is an ever-varying combination of possibilities. It is for this reason that verification, the limiting or pinning down of reality to one level only, is simply not possible.

The Basement is framed in its opening and closing scenes by essentially the same situation except that the closing (which is a new beginning) presents another combination of the possibilities. As the play opens, Jane and Stott arrive in the rain and knock at the door of Law's flat. When the play closes, the cycle appears to be beginning again, except that it is now Jane and Law who arrive in the rain at Stott's flat. This fact alone is a dramatization of Pinter's approach to reality and also indicates the lengths to which he is willing to go to present his concept of the impossibility of verification. The body of the play consists of what appear to be randomly chosen scenes that dramatize the relationships (actual or potential) among the three characters. There are at least three different furnishings of the room in which much of the action occurs. These settings change a number of times, sometimes alternating back and forth. The seasons of the year also alternate -- from winter to summer and back -- and there are few series of scenes which can be chronologically linked. Thus, the play stimulates the audience to wonder what is real and what unreal. At the end of the play real and unreal (if such categories can meaningfully be applied to the play) become contiguous, since there are no longer any hard distinctions between the two. Only possibilities exist, and the action moves on to present just one more possible combination of them.

Given these considerations and granted that the play is Pinter's dramatic vision of life (whether the vision is in terms of objective reality, psychological reality, or the mind of a man), it is apparent that the play's technique and the device of role-reversal provide implicit commentary on the dramatist's approach to verification. Generally, due to the lack of information provided about the alternation between summer and winter, and the unexplained changes in furnishings, the technique employed in The Basement can be labelled non-verification. The complexities of plot and scene are simply not explained. Are the scenes presented in chronological order or are they randomly chosen to represent various spots of time? What is the truth about the characters' relationships with each other, since they appear to be in continual flux? Does the action occur over a long period of time or in a momentary dream within the mind of one or more of the characters? All these questions are left unanswered, as is the problem of why (or indeed even if) the play is cyclic.

But to dismiss The Basement after a cursory discussion of the questions it raises, or merely to make a few comments regarding the utility of the medium of television in shaping the technique of non-verification, is to miss the most important feature of the play, which is its implicit statement about the problems of verification. In a play in which a main character attempts to verify the truth (Edward in A Slight Ache) or at least evokes by his personality the difficulty of verification (Davies in The Caretaker), the relationship of the play to the theme of verification is clear. In The Basement however, this relationship is considerably more subtle since it is implicit, not only in the general technique of non-verification that the play presents, but also in the

careful framing of the play which suggests that other possible combinations of events could occur.

In The Basement the reader becomes aware for the first and only time of the machinations of the dramatist in terms of his own quest for verification, a quest the purpose of which is to portray more accurately and yet paradoxically more ambiguously, the nature of reality as he sees it. (This is the quest of all artists.) The framework of The Basement shows that a play can itself become a quest for possibilities. That we become aware that Pinter consciously frames the play as a quest may be a dramatic flaw, but in terms of the focus of this study is rather to be considered as a very interesting byway that Pinter has followed through his life to this conclusion. His interest in the cyclic nature of things can be traced as far back as 1949, when he completed a prose poem called "Kullus" that presents much the same situation and a similar cyclical structure as does The Basement.² Later, in 1959, Pinter published a short story called "The Examination", which also explores a cycle involving a role-reversal, in this case, a reversal in which, Kafka-like, the examiner becomes the examined.

In The Basement the framework which surrounds the play suggests that although no particular character is attempting to verify things, the play itself can be regarded as an exploration of some of the numerous possibilities provided when reality is recognized as unverifiable and contains no absolutes. As the possibility of a cyclic return for the play becomes apparent, the implication that the exploration could continue indefinitely (as in Beckett's Play) also arises. Even this implication however, although it is definitely suggested, is not verified. Whether

or not Stott allows Law and Jane to come in and further extend the possibilities is not shown. Thus, the concept of the infinitely broad range of levels of reality is left unsullied.

However, the weaknesses of The Basement are closely linked with this concept. In a cerebral sense the play has power to excite curiosity about the nature of reality and the problems of verification. But dramatically the frequent sharp cuts from scene to scene, the total mystification regarding chronology and the nature of the human relationships being presented, all tend to weaken the force of the play. In The Basement Pinter's interest in television appears to be mainly technical, and though the play does operate as an understandable image of the flux of human relationships, it fails to rise above the level of mere intellectual interest. To discuss the play fully is difficult because of the nature of the action presented. While it can be considered intellectually in terms of its approach to reality, it simply does not reveal the fineness of perception and careful economy that some of Pinter's other television plays (for example, The Collection and The Lover) contain. One is tempted to consider the sharp scene changes and other technical effects as "trick" photography that often adds little to the force of the play though it does increase the mystery of it. Pinter's earlier television play Tea Party utilizes similar techniques in a far more effective manner, while Landscape and Silence totally avoid this technical bent but still maintain the interest in non-verification and economy of means.

Nonetheless, Pinter's device of role-reversal, particularly as used in The Basement as a cyclic framework for the play, is an important element in the study of his exploration of the problems of verification.

It is closely linked to another technique by which Pinter explores personal realities more directly, and shows that as there is a possibility that objective reality is more likely layered than solid, so also the minds of men contain the germs of many personalities and many roles. The concept of layered reality can be extended to include multiple personality, an issue that Pinter confronts head on in The Lover.

VII

THE LOVER

In The Lover, broadcast by Associated Rediffusion Television in 1963, Pinter adopts a psychological approach to elucidate the problem of verification in the modern world. The play is a psychological study of role-playing: though there are actually only two characters in it, these two play a number of roles that expose the various layers of their personalities. This use of multiple personalities within a single character is a comment on the nature of personal reality and suggests the broad range of possibilities involved. Although The Lover is not constructed of scenes randomly chosen as The Basement appears to be, once again the technique of non-verification provides the foundation of the play. But once again, verified answers to the questions raised are less important than the total effect of the technique. Why Richard and Sara set the afternoons apart for their erotic rituals and game playing in roles apparently other than their own is a question best answered by a psychologist. The interest of this study is to determine in what terms The Lover operates within the concept of verification and what ramifications about that concept it provides. There are two directions from which to approach the problem: first, from the point of view of the general impressions regarding the nature of human personality that the play offers; and second, the specific quest for verification that Richard embarks on within the play.

Basically The Lover is composed of divisions. Divisions of personality layers are linked to divisions of time. Richard, Sara's loving and tolerant husband during the early morning and evening, sports another role in the afternoon -- that of Max, a much more casual man, both in attire and action. Sara, Richard's elegant wife and Max's full-time mistress, adapts herself to a variety of erotic roles during the afternoon, each determined by the context of the ritual or game at hand. Just as Sara, Richard's wife, has a lover in Max, Richard keeps a whore, "a common or garden slut" (55) who is actually Sara. Richard as Max, however, takes the opposite view of Sara, his mistress. The Max-role of Richard's personality looks on Sara as "a full-time mistress, [. . .] a woman of grace, elegance, wit, imagination" (70). Pinter's presentation of multiple personalities is not unique. It does however extend the usual view of the occurrence by presenting two sides of a character that are extremes -- perfect opposites. All people contain in themselves a variety of roles which they play in different situations but few if any change from loving, tolerant and stuffy husband to brutal rapist between morning and afternoon. Yet these are the extremes or contraries that Richard-Max embodies.

The complexity of the roles and relationships that can emerge from the minds of just two characters is Pinter's tribute to the richness provided by the impossibility of verification in such a case. The audience, in being presented with two characters who act like at least four, is faced with the task of attempting to verify which set of personalities within which situation belongs to the real world and which to a world of fantasy. Thus the very organization of the play mimics the ever-present problem of

verification. It has long been recognized that multiple personalities can exist within a single person but the answer to the question 'Which is more real?' has never been more than a relative one. To say that Max is more real to Richard than Richard himself is, is merely to point out that the Max-role dominates the total personality at a given moment in time. But this is no absolute answer. The Lover describes some of the layers that exist within a couple's own minds, within their relationship and within their lives. In doing so it merely takes a more personal approach to the problem of reality than does The Basement. If The Basement explodes the notion that objective reality is a single, unified, solid substance and dissects a few of the layers of possibilities that reality actually is, then The Lover does the same for the realities of personality. The net result is to provide a dramatically effective working model of some of the layers of personal realities that exist for just two characters. The possibilities latent in objective reality, when combined with the possibilities inherent within personalities, reveal something of the complexity of the modern world.

Going beyond general discussion of The Lover reveals yet another way in which the play is linked to the theme of the problems of verification. The movement of The Lover is toward a breakdown of the carefully nurtured and balanced relationship Richard and Sara have built up between themselves. By mutual agreement they decided not to allow their various realities to overlap -- the afternoon and the evening were always to be kept distinct.¹ The action of the play however is built around a blurring of these distinctions that is initiated by Richard either in an attempt to normalize the relationship or to extend the pleasures of the afternoon

into the evening. It would seem that these goals are the opposite of each other and therefore that it is foolish not to know which motive is correct. But the point is that Richard attempts, one way or another, to equalize things, and by doing so, tries to pin them down, at least to a greater extent than they are. This is essentially a quest for verification.

The first evidence of this movement is revealed by Richard's vague dissatisfaction with the status quo when he arrives home one evening after Sara has spent an afternoon with her lover. Richard's conversation includes half-hidden criticism and open curiosity about the afternoon. Finally his true feelings surface as he asks:

Does it ever occur to you that while you're spending the afternoon being unfaithful to me I'm sitting at a desk going through balance sheets and graphs? (53)

The couple's discussion of Sara's lover and Richard's whore continues throughout the evening, both of them assuring each other that jealousy is uncivilized and that "Frankness at all costs [is] essential to a healthy marriage" (56). Their thoughts proceed together to an inevitable conclusion, expressed with startling simultaneity:

RICHARD. [. . .] What would happen if I came home early one day, I wonder?

Pause.

SARA. What would happen if I followed you one day, I wonder? (59)

Although the audience is not at this point aware that Richard is Sara's lover and Sara Richard's whore, hindsight later shows it to be apparent that whether Richard realizes it or not, the husband side of his personality is acutely interested in the Max-lover side, a situation which does not bode well for the "beautifully balanced" (61) relationship that Sara feels she and Richard have.

This trend continues the next day, when Max expresses interest in Sara's husband. After wondering "what he's like" (68) Max goes on:

I wonder if we'd get on. I wonder if we'd . . .
you know . . . hit it off. (68)

Then, after asking why Richard puts up with the fact that his wife has a lover, Max finally gets to his point:

Well, I'm beginning to mind.

Pause.

SARA. What did you say.

MAX. I'm beginning to mind.

(68-9)

He claims that his wife has never suspected that he had a "full-time mistress [. . .] in an affair that's been going on for years" (70), but thought that he just frequented a whore. As the scene progresses Max suggests that perhaps he should meet Richard and "have a word with him" (70) in order to clarify the situation.² Finally, he rejects Sara because she is too bony.

Later, when Richard arrives home, he also has come to a decision. He forbids Sara to entertain her lover in his living room, saying that her "life of depravity" and "path of illegitimate lust" (77) must stop. The situation, Richard feels, is no longer tolerable.

It's insupportable. It has become insupportable.
I'm no longer disposed to put up with it. (79)

He goes so far as to say concerning Max: "If I find him on these premises I'll kick his teeth out" (79).

Although it would be interesting, in psychological terms, to understand Richard's motives, Pinter realizes that such verified information is not always available, and thus is content to present the effect of Richard's actions. It is apparent, as Richard says, that the situation

is "insupportable" to him, and the word implies that he is perhaps reacting against the necessity of supporting more than one fully developed role within his psyche. He apparently wishes to narrow the field by ridding himself of the burden of one of his extra roles; thus he is attempting to concentrate his existence more. By concentrating it he will increase the security that his life provides -- or, in terms that also apply to Edward, he will define and establish a single identity. This is once again a quest for the certainty provided by verification of identity.

Regarding Richard's efforts as an attempt to normalize the situation and stabilize his identity as Richard, Sara's husband, is only one of the possibilities The Lover provides. The only justifiable reason for dwelling on this possibility and considering it as the dominant one is that, when so considered, it lends a touch of irony to the ending of the play. As will be shown, the irony thus generated amplifies and to some extent clarifies Pinter's implicit comment about the potential effect that the numerous layers of personalities have on what is usually called reality. Sara reacts against Richard's attempt by first questioning him, then caressing him.

How can you talk like this?

Pause.

Why today . . . so suddenly?

Pause.

Mmm?

She is close to him.

You've had a hard day . . . at the office. All those overseas people. It's so tiring. But it's silly, it's so silly, to talk like this. I'm here. For you. And you've always appreciated . . . how much these afternoons . . . mean. You've always understood.

She presses her cheek to his.

Understanding is so rare, so dear.

She continues, not understanding why Richard is reacting against what has apparently been the best part of their lives.

SARA.. What about your own bloody whore?
 RICHARD. I've paid her off.
 SARA. Have you? Why?
 RICHARD. She was too bony.
Slight pause.
 SARA. But you liked . . . you said you liked . . . Richard . . . but you love me . . .
 RICHARD. Of course.
 SARA. Yes . . . you love me . . . you don't mind him . . . you understand him . . . don't you? . . . I mean, you know better than I do . . . darling . . . all's well . . . all's well . . . the evenings . . . and the afternoons . . . do you see?

(79-80)

Then, abruptly, the tone changes. Richard takes the bongo drum that Sara and he (as Max) use in their afternoon games.³ He fires questions at Sara concerning the function of the drum. At first Sara is upset at the deliberate mixing of levels and times that he is provoking. She says "with quiet anguish":

You've no right to question me. No right at all. It was our arrangement. No questions of this kind. Please. Don't, don't. It was our arrangement. (81)

Finally her reserve fails and she explodes into rage, claiming that she entertains many more lovers than one. With the breakdown Richard begins to advance upon her, sensually scratching the drum just as Max does during the afternoon. He taunts her with it for a moment and then utters the cue-line for one of their love rituals, in which he takes the role of a passing stranger who assaults a woman in a park. As the games begin, the afternoon life suddenly floods into the evening. At first Sara protests, either against the overlapping or simply in terms of her role as the woman in the park. Suddenly she giggles and expresses another ambiguous thought that

fits both the actual situation and the game that Richard has started:

I'm trapped.
Pause.
What will my husband say?
Pause.
(83)

But shortly she collapses wholeheartedly into the ritual:

You're very forward. You really are. Oh, you really are. But my husband will understand. My husband does understand. (83)

Then the play ends as both Richard and Sara sink naturally into their "other" roles of lover and whore.

The irony generated by the ending of the play is due to the fact that if Richard, by his protesting against Sara's afternoon recreation, hopes to normalize the situation into a simple, stable, husband-wife relationship, then he fails completely since he is slowly drawn into the afternoon games. Thus, the level of reality that appeared to be fantasy has become strong enough to take over the time allotted to what seemed to be reality. The potential effect of multiple personality layers operating within a single character is therefore capable of influencing even the apparent realities of a situation.

But in terms of this study, the emphasis on one single aspect of Richard's unknown motives is expedience only, and is not meant to imply that his motives are so clear-cut. Such verification of motives is simply not possible in a Pinter play. Again, the attempt to pin down an aspect of life or existence has failed -- if Richard is more secure at the end of the play because he is simply a lover rather than a husband and a lover, it is not because he has succeeded in actually defining the role he will play. Although he may have diminished the number of roles or

personalities he carries, he actually has merely varied the emphasis of his life. He is still saddled with the roles he plays within the context of the various love-games he and Sara indulge in.

Thus, The Lover reveals one more aspect of Pinter's approach to the problem of verification. It portrays the multiple roles or personalities one character can have and forces the reader or audience to the conclusion that verification of any one of those roles (since each role is another layer of reality) is hopeless. The Lover also presents, in a modified form, a quest for verification, in which a character attempts to stabilize his identity within his relationship. In terms of verification, Richard fails; in terms of his goal he also fails but, ironically, within the particular layer of reality in which the lover and the whore live, he succeeds.

Pinter's depiction of multiple roles inhabiting a single character to portray the nature of a man's mind is forceful primarily because of the amazing compression thus achieved. The technique of non-verification, by the very fact that it tends to leave out much of what was once considered essential information, is always compressionistic.⁴ In The Lover however, Pinter extends this advantage by developing the concept of multiple roles.

VIII

TEA PARTY

Pinter does not attack the theme of verification directly in Tea Party, a television play first presented in 1965. Rather he explores just one facet of the theme through the mind of Robert Disson, a man who manufactures sanitary ware "almost by way of being a mission" (10). The play presents Disson's mental deterioration and breakdown as evidenced, to begin with, by the failures of his sight. Visual perception is a prerequisite of verification and the concept of understanding is often expressed by the verb "to see". Thus, visual difficulties are metaphorically symptomatic of mental perceptual problems. One who cannot clearly see the world around him cannot verify or comprehend anything in it. It is in this sense that perception is linked to verification. Pinter's interest in the problem of perception is apparent in a number of his plays, the most important of which with regard to this theme was A Slight Ache. But in The Room, The Birthday Party and A Slight Ache, the theme of failures in perception has been a mere adjunct to the problem at hand, and it is only in Tea Party that Pinter explores a variety of the possibilities the theme provides.

The object of Robert Disson's quest for verification is not named in the play. But, like Edward in A Slight Ache, Disson is confronted with a situation that requires that he muster all his self-confidence and clarity of purpose. Disson considers that these qualities

are his primary virtues; and hiding behind an exterior or false front inlaid with them, he fails to comprehend what is happening within himself. Pinter's manipulation of the medium of television is superb. By varying the point of view from which the audience sees the action, and by changing the quality of that vision through the lens of a camera, he portrays the workings of Disson's mind as clearly as if by dissection.

Disson's problem (and the audience's also, since they see through his eyes) is to comprehend and thus to verify the suspicious occurrences that happen around him. All his inner fears and doubts about his own strength or sexual and mental superiority are reflected in what he imagines and in what he actually sees around him. Because of the difficulty of verification, these two categories, imaginary and actual, cannot be separated. Disson's problems seem to be aggravated by sexual tension, since a very oblique sexual byplay often occurs between himself and Wendy, his new secretary. During the interview before she is hired, she habitually (and almost continually) crosses and recrosses her legs, as if to flaunt her sexuality at Disson. Wendy's reason for leaving her previous job is significant in this regard, and her explanation of the matter immediately reveals the directions of Disson's thoughts:

WENDY. Well, it's simply that I couldn't persuade my chief . . .
to call a halt to his attentions.
DISSON. What? [. . .] A firm of this repute? It's unbelievable.
WENDY. I'm afraid it's true, sir.
 Pause.
DISSON. What sort of attentions?
WENDY. Oh, I don't . . .
DISSON. What sort?
 Pause.
WENDY. He never stopped touching me, Mr Disson, that's all.
DISSON. Touching you?
WENDY. Yes.
DISSON. Where? (Quickly.) That must have been disturbing
for you.

WENDY. Well, quite frankly, it is disturbing, to be touched all the time.

DISSON. Do you mean at every opportunity?

WENDY. Yes, sir.

Slight pause.

(11)

Disson's other difficulties centre around lack of confidence in his personal strength and suspicions about the nature of the relationship between his new wife, Diana, and her brother Willy. A short scene suggesting a sumptuous hotel room in Italy represents the honeymoon, and paints a clear picture of one of Disson's fears:

DISSON. Are you happy?

DIANA. Yes.

DISSON. Very happy?

DIANA. Yes.

DISSON. Have you ever been happier? With any other man?

DIANA. Never.

Pause.

DISSON. I make you happy, don't I? Happier than you've ever been . . . with any other man.

DIANA. Yes. You do.

Pause.

Yes.

Silence.

(16)

This trend continues throughout the early part of the play:

DISSON. [. . .] I'm glad you didn't marry that . . . Jerry . . . whatever his name was . . .

DIANA. Oh, him . . .

DISSON. Why didn't you?

DIANA. He was weak.

Pause.

DISSON. I'm not weak.

DIANA. No.

DISSON. Am I?

(17)

These objective views of Disson's personality are contrasted with his own perceptions of himself. As a result of his delight in hearing Willy speak in honor of the groom at the wedding (though the speech

became merely a second encomium of the bride, Diana), Disson invites Willy to work with him. He explains his view of the world and himself:

I think I should explain to you the sort of man I am. I'm a thorough man. I like things to be done and done well. I don't like dithering. I don't like indulgence. I don't like self-doubt. I don't like fuzziness. I like clarity. Clear intention. Precise execution. [.] In my view, living is a matter of active and willing participation. So is work. [.] Now, dependence isn't a word I would use lightly, but I will use it and I don't regard it as a weakness. To understand the meaning of the term dependence is to understand that one's powers are limited and that to live with others is not only sensible but the only way work can be done and dignity achieved. Nothing is more sterile and lamentable than the man content to live within himself. I've always made it my business to be on the most direct possible terms with the members of my staff and the body of my business associates. And by my example opinions are declared freely, without shame or deception. It seems to me essential that we cultivate the ability to operate lucidly upon our problems and therefore be in a position to solve them. That's why your sister loves me. I don't play about at the periphery of matters. I go right to the centre. I believe life can be conducted efficiently. I never waste my energies in any kind of timorous expectation. Neither do I ask to be loved. I expect to be given only what I've worked for. (18-19)

As the play progresses all the elements of Disson's breakdown consolidate. His wife, Diana, expresses her desire to work with the company, and becomes her brother's private secretary, installed in the office next to Disson's. Wendy's implicit sexual challenges become more open. Finally the trouble with Disson's eyes begins. He and Willy are playing ping-pong when Willy serves and suddenly "From DISSON'S point of view [.] two balls bounce and leap past both ears" (24). He finds out later from Disley, his eye consultant, that his eyesight is as close to perfect as it can be. But Disson tries to explain:

Listen . . . I never said I couldn't see. You don't understand. Most of the time . . . my eyesight is excellent. It always has been. But . . . it's become unreliable. It's become . . . erratic. Sometimes, quite

suddenly, very occasionally, something happens . . .
something . . . goes wrong . . . with my eyes.

Pause.
(26)

Later, the problem of the relationship between Diana and Willy arises as Disson complains that he never sees his wife since she works.

DIANA. But I like working. You wouldn't want me to work for someone else, would you, somewhere else?
 DISSON. I certainly wouldn't. You know what Wendy told me, don't you?
 DIANA. What?
 DISSON. She told me her last employer was always touching her.
 WILLY. No?
 DISSON. Always. Touching her.
 DIANA. Her body, you mean?
 DISSON. What else?
Pause.
 DIANA. Well, if we're to take it that that's general practice, I think it's safer to stay in the family, don't you? Mind you, they might not want to touch me in the way they wanted to touch her.

Pause.
(28)

From here, Disson's breakdown begins quickly, just as his involvement with Wendy and his suspicions about Diana and Willy increase. Since his eyes hurt, Disson asks Wendy to bind her chiffon scarf around his head, then begins to reach out and touch her body while he is blindfolded. When Willy calls to ask to borrow Wendy for a moment, since he says Diana was unwell and has gone home, Disson agrees, then eavesdrops at the door and "hears giggles, hissing, gurgles, squeals" (33). When Diana opens the door and asks "What game is this?" he becomes angry, asking:

DISSON. [. . .] What were you doing in there? I thought you'd gone home. What were you doing in there?
 DIANA. I came back.
 DISSON. You mean you were in there with both of them? In there with both of them?

(33)

Perhaps Disson's hearing is being affected as his sight is. His problems of perception continue. As he stares at Wendy "Suddenly [her] body appears in enormous close-up. Her buttocks fill the screen" (35). Later he sinks to the floor in total collapse during a mock soccer match with Wendy, showing that she now dominates him completely. Again, during dictation of a letter, the screen goes black, showing Disson's point of view:

DISSON. Are my eyes open?
WENDY. Mr Disson, really . . .
DISSON. Is this you? This I feel?
WENDY. Yes.
DISSON. What, all this I can feel?
WENDY. You're playing one of your games, Mr Disson. You're being naughty again.

(38)

Disson becomes paranoid, believing that people whisper about him when his back is turned. Yet, just as he seems most upset at Willy because of his private fears, Disson suddenly changes his tactics and makes him a partner in the firm, saying significantly, "I want you to share full responsibility . . . with me" (41).

The play covers a year of Disson's life, and the tea party is held to celebrate his and Diana's first anniversary. Disson's eyes trouble him just before the party starts and he has Disley bind his head with a tight bandage. During the climactic scene of the tea party there are only two points of view: views through Disson's eyes (even though he is blindfolded), and shots that include him. From Disson's point of view, no dialogue is heard, and figures move "in conspiratorial postures, seemingly whispering together" (49). Willy, smiling to himself, approaches and hands Disson a ping-pong ball. Disson sees Willy lead Wendy and Diana to a desk with his arms around them, and lie them down head to toe. In

turn Willy caresses their faces, while the remainder of the group appear (to Disson) to take no notice. Finally the scene changes to include Disson as he falls to the floor in his chair. As if in a catatonic trance, he cannot be moved, though his eyes are open when Disley cuts the bandage off. The play ends as Diana tries to get through to him but to no avail. He hears and sees nothing.

It is primarily Pinter's adept control of the medium of television that allows him to penetrate Disson's mind so thoroughly. One of the advantages of television over stage is that it allows multiple points of view which can be characterized, contrasted, and alternated to provide rich material for one who is concerned with the problems of verification. Pinter's techniques of enlargement, doubling, blackout and silent shots show that reality or what is considered to be 'out there' varies according to the mental state of the observer. In The Lover Pinter presented some of the ever-changing interior landscapes that exist within the minds of people. Tea Party also presents interior landscapes, but projects them through Disson's eyes to reveal the objects of his fears. In Disson's mind we are introduced to another set of possibilities that exist side by side with what so-called normal people see as reality. The television audience, viewing the action either through Disson's organs of sense or through some impersonal point of view, becomes attuned to the interior scenes and the contrast thus provided. Tea Party is therefore an excursion into the mind of a man that occurs on a number of levels, each one existing as a possible reality.

Disson's problem is with verification in the sense that perception is verification, just as clear perception is knowledge. William Blake once

said: "If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite"¹, meaning that a man's vision could become his VISION, and suggesting that true reality is not 'out there' but rather resides within the mind. Pinter recognizes the distinction but does not hastily label interior reality as an absolute rather than the "out there" variety. Possibilities are the keynote. What is unreal, according to Blake, is confused with what is real. For Pinter as well, things can be both real and unreal, and both true and false. Tea Party presents at least two perspectives of reality, one of which is clearly linked to Disson's mental condition. From what source does the other arise? The answer to that question is as unverifiable as is the answer to the question "Which is more real?"

IX

THE COLLECTION

The Collection, broadcast by Associated Rediffusion Television in 1961, is a concrete image of Pinter's realization that verification is impossible. Of all his plays it is the one most directly concerned with the ramifications of the ideas expressed in the program note quoted earlier.¹ The play presents various different contradictory and continually changing statements about one particular event. Two of the four characters are directly concerned with attempting to resolve the problem -- whether or not two young dress-designers, Stella and Bill, slept together at a convention they attended in Leeds. The question is purposely viewed from all possible angles, since not only James, Stella's husband, is involved, but so also is Harry Kane, an older man who shares his house with Bill. Once again Pinter explores as many possible levels of reality as he can; almost all the relationships that are possible among the four are either depicted or hinted at, except the only one which can reveal the truth. Stella and Bill never appear together during the play.

The action of the drama arises mainly from the tension between the futile attempt to verify facts by James and the continual efforts made by Bill and Stella to avoid being pinned down. The Collection's presentation of the concept that verification of a fact is impossible is the most satisfying and complete portrayal Pinter makes. Since there are also numerous other elements important to the character study that

occurs, The Collection is by no means a thinly fleshed out thesis play. The richness of the drama is testified to by the difficulties inherent in attempting to describe the elements that make it.

The tension produced by the action of The Collection is portrayed as a series of confrontations that end in confessions. As each confrontation progresses to an apparent solution, then beyond to the realization that the solution has not yet been reached, the action of the play becomes like a ladder, providing a step by step increase of dramatic tension. The culmination of this trend is relief, but not due to any final unveiling of the truth. Rather the play ends on an ambiguous note that is clearly the only solution possible in Pinter's world. The Collection thus dramatizes the appropriateness of Pinter's approach to verification.

Prior to the beginning of the play, Stella has apparently come home from the convention and confessed to her husband that she was unfaithful. James' reaction is to approach Bill some time later in order to get corroboration of the story. He has difficulty locating Bill partly because of Harry Kane's possessive nature, which suggests a homosexual liaison between the older man and Bill.

HARRY. You didn't by any chance telephone just now?
JAMES. I think you've got the wrong man.
HARRY. I think you have.
JAMES. I don't think you know anything about it.

(15)

When James finally does track Bill down, he states his case "confidentially":

When you treat my wife like a whore, then I think I'm entitled to know what you've got to say about it. (19)

Bill at first denies everything, even having been in Leeds. The repartee between the two is quick and witty until James makes a sudden

move and causes Bill to stumble and fall. Feeling very vulnerable lying on the floor, Bill relents, saying "If you let me get up . . . I'll . . . I'll tell you . . . the truth . . ." (23) He proceeds to tell a modified version of what James has been claiming and suggests that he and Stella merely traded a few kisses. When James continues to relate what he has deduced or heard from Stella and mentions that he phoned her that night, Bill tips his hand (purposely?) by correcting a detail in the story:

JAMES. Then I phoned.

Pause.

I spoke to her. Asked her how she was. She said she was all right. Her voice was a little low. I asked her to speak up. She didn't have much to say. You were sitting on the bed, next to her.

Silence.

BILL. Not sitting. Lying.

(24-5)

With this the scene ends.

The amount of equivocation throughout the play is already apparent.² This trend continues in the next scene, when James tells Stella, after the fact, that he has decided to go and see Bill. Eventually he modulates his version of this story down a tone or two and admits that he has already talked to the young dress-designer. Still however he is not completely truthful, saying that Bill

remembered the occasion well. He was perfectly frank. You know, a man's man. Straight from the shoulder. He entirely confirmed your story. (31)

When Stella begins to cry, saying that she hoped James would understand, James replies in words that could be the keynote of this thesis:

Well, I do understand, but only after meeting him. Now I'm perfectly happy. I can see it both ways, three ways, all ways . . . every way. It's perfectly clear, there's nothing to it, everything's back to normal. (31-2)

The possibility of yet another level of reality being opened by the formation of a new relationship is also hinted at as James goes on to say:

No, really, I think I should thank you, rather than anything else. After two years of marriage it looks as though, by accident, you've opened up a whole new world for me. (32)

The next scene reasserts this hint, showing James and Bill meeting again, this time in a much more congenial atmosphere.

It is during this meeting that Harry begins to attempt to verify some of the facts as he sees them. He visits Stella and mentions that her husband has been bothering Bill "with some fantastic story" (36). Stella apologizes, excusing James on the basis that he has "not been very well, actually . . . overwork" (36). Harry leaves, seemingly quite satisfied with this new version of the story. The scene changes back to James and Bill, where hostility has again broken out. Bill questions James' feelings and again the keynote is sounded. He says:

Surely the wound heals when you know the truth, doesn't it? I mean, when the truth is verified? (39)

This however, does not satisfy James and he tries to goad Bill into a mock duel with fruit and cheese knives. He ends by tossing a knife at Bill who is slightly cut. Then Harry enters.

Harry brings yet another version of the truth, saying that Stella has made a confession to him.

What she confessed was . . . that she'd made the whole damn thing up. She'd made the whole damn thing up. For some odd reason of her own. They never met, you see, Bill and your wife; they never even spoke. This is what Bill says, and this is now what your wife admits. They had nothing whatever to do with each other; they don't know each other. (42)

When James asks Bill "Isn't it strange that you confirmed the whole of

her story?", he simply answers "It amused me to do so" (42). But James finally seems satisfied and a little embarrassed. He apologizes for cutting Bill and continues:

Look . . . I really think I ought to apologize for this silly story my wife made up. The fault is really all hers, and mine, for believing her. You're not to blame for taking it as you did. The whole thing must have been an impossible burden for you. What do you say we shake hands, as a testimony of my goodwill? (44)

At this Bill breaks down, and in a fit of what appears to be guilt, tells yet another version of the story, "the truth" (44), as he calls it:

I never touched her . . . we sat . . . in the lounge, on a sofa . . . for two hours . . . talked . . . we talked about it . . . we didn't . . . move from the lounge . . . never went to her room . . . just talked . . . about what we would do . . . if we did get to her room. . . two hours . . . we never touched . . . we just talked about it . . .
 (44-5)

With this revelation the play moves toward the final scene, in which James once again taxes Stella with the question:

You didn't do anything, did you?

Pause.

He wasn't in your room. You just talked about it, in the lounge.

Pause.

That's the truth, isn't it?

Pause.

You just sat and talked about what you would do if you went to your room. That's what you did.

Pause.

Didn't you?

Pause.

That's the truth . . . isn't it?

(45)

Finally the play ends with the stage direction: "Stella looks at him, neither confirming or denying. Her face is friendly, sympathetic" (45).

The momentary suspension that closes The Collection is reminiscent of the similar device Pinter uses to end The Dumb Waiter. Its effect is

to continue the essential progress of non-verification that forms the play to the point at which Pinter's message becomes almost painfully clear.

Far from being melodramatic however, the ending of The Collection neatly increases the dramatic force of the play by providing the only logical and completely necessary outcome. Considering the web of lies, ambiguities and half-truths that James has had to struggle against in his search for truth throughout the play, the action can end in no other way. Stella's sympathetic look reinforces the feeling that it is man's nature that drives him to engage in a continual -- but fruitless -- quest for truth.

Thus, The Collection dramatizes Pinter's realization that absolute truth is not an easily available commodity in the modern world. The reason for this is that reality is simply too complex to be just one thing. While, philosophically speaking, there may be a One composed of the Many, the only perception man as a finite animal can have is of the Many. Pinter explains this view of the world with specific reference to The Collection:

When an event occurs -- some kind of sexual event in The Collection, for example -- it is made up of many little events. Each person will take away and remember what is most significant to him. The more other people try to verify, the less they know.³

Thus, verification of a fact as absolute truth, in the sense of transfixing and immobilizing an event or action with a definition, is impossible and cannot lead to knowledge. Pinter's plays point up this concept mainly by implication; the ramifications of the concept suggest that a more consistent view of reality -- that is, more consistent knowledge -- can be obtained by admitting ambiguity, by discovering possibilities, and by accepting all possible levels of reality. Whether this is sound philosophical doctrine or not is not the major concern of this thesis. This

approach desires simply to increase understanding of Pinter's plays by avoiding too rigid interpretation in favour of a more accepting attitude, and to consider in passing the dramatic force with which the plays are presented. The plays themselves lead one to these conclusions about the care with which they should be interpreted; Pinter's thoughts expressed elsewhere reinforce the warning.

X

CONCLUSION

Before concluding this study with some appropriate passages from The Homecoming and The Dwarfs that both substantiate and reinforce the conclusions already reached, it is necessary to place Pinter's work in a broader perspective. This will be done by contrasting his approaches and achievements with those of other modern dramatists. Thus, it is the purpose of the first section of this chapter to outline the differences between Pinter and his contemporaries. To begin with, however, it is necessary to prepare the background of this discussion by characterizing modern literature as having an essentially different focus than literature of the past.

Throughout this thesis it has been taken for granted that the problem of verification is central to all drama. Naturally, Pinter is not the first artist to consider this problem, nor even the first to see that it is a basic difficulty of human existence. It is a source of tension that is apparent in all great plays, notably for example, in Oedipus Rex and Macbeth. These two works come to mind immediately but almost any great play would serve as an example. Just as great drama (and indeed all art) is a representation of life, so it contains the essence of the problems of human existence, that is, the problem of knowledge or verification. Oedipus' resolve to "drive pollution from the land"¹ is the heroic step that begins his questioning and seeking

of truth that leads him faster and faster down the path towards his tragic fate. His attempt to discover the truth is the primary impetus of the play, and his actions in doing so are implicitly paralleled with his success in solving the riddle of the Sphinx. Pinter's approach to the difficulties of verification takes him, in a sense, back to that moment when Oedipus, on the road to Thebes, was accosted by the Sphinx. Pinter finds that modern riddles are not so susceptible to unravelling, both because of their greater complexity and the lack of a heroic figure, but also because of the lack of an absolute concept of truth. This is perhaps the main distinguishing factor that sets the modern quest for truth apart from what has gone before. Modern artists rarely lay a claim on absolute truth; rather they attempt to present as many facets of life and consciousness as possible. Virginia Woolf makes this point in her essay "Modern Fiction".² Thus, where literature of the past is dominated by a feeling that the artist has a God's-eye-view of the events he portrays, modern literature realizes that absolute truth is not so easily obtained. Just as surely as Oedipus discovers the truth, so Pinter is unable -- and unwilling -- to do so.

Macbeth also centres on the problem of verification. The riddles of the Weird Sisters provide not only the unverified framework for the whole play but kindle in Macbeth's mind awareness of the possibilities in his life and set him on his quest. From his first apprehension of the "Two truths [that] are told",³ to his (and our) perplexed wonderment at who it is that is not of woman born and how Birnam wood shall come to Dunsinane, Macbeth is mired deep in the problem of verification. But once again, the modern viewpoint differs from that of the past. For

Shakespeare, truth is uncovered by careful presentation of the problems of appearance and reality; for Pinter there is no such resolution (and no absolute truth) since appearance and reality cannot be distinguished.

Thus it is apparent that while the problem of verification is by no means a subject unique to Harold Pinter's drama, nonetheless the variety and effectiveness -- both philosophic and dramatic -- of his approaches to the problem reflect his understanding of the importance of the subject in the modern world. Since this study (and indeed almost all studies of Pinter's work) has noted similarities in subject matter and technique between Pinter and other modern writers, especially Beckett, Ionesco, Pirandello and Kafka, it is also worthwhile to consider in passing Pinter's relationships with these others. It will be shown that Pinter's understanding of verification and his dramatic technique is not simply slavish imitation of Beckett, Ionesco and Pirandello. The technical similarities between Pinter and these others are apparent (and Pinter has in fact mentioned Beckett and Kafka as influences⁴) but at this point the differences must be considered.

One major difference between Pinter and his forerunners Beckett and Ionesco is his approach to language and communication. For Pinter, language serves as a barometer of an individual's secret thoughts, fears, dreads, hopes and aspirations. So also does silence:

There are two silences. One when no word is spoken. The other when perhaps a torrent of language is employed. This speech is speaking of a language locked beneath it. That is its continual reference. The speech we hear is an indication of that we don't hear. It is a necessary avoidance, a violent, sly, anguished, or mocking smoke-screen which keeps the other in its place. When true silence falls we are still left with echo but are nearer nakedness. One way of looking at speech is to say it is a constant stratagem to cover nakedness.⁵

Thus, for a Pinter character speech is often a hiding place. By the same token, however, it is a dramatic device capable of laying bare the hidden caverns of a mind. But at no time does Pinter suggest -- as do Beckett and Ionesco -- that communication is impossible. "Language in Beckett's plays serves to expose the breakdown, the disintegration of language."⁶ Because of the failures of language Beckett's characters are unable to communicate. Each day Didi and Gogo attempt to make themselves known and understood to Lucky and Pozzo, but dumbness and blindness are all that they are greeted with.

Pirandello also appears to believe that communication between people is impossible, and, like Beckett and Ionesco, it is language that is the root cause of this fact. Consider this complaint by the Father in Six Characters in Search of an Author:

But don't you see that the whole trouble lies here. In words, words. Each one of us has within him a whole world of things, each man of us is his own special world. And how can we ever come to an understanding if I put into the words I utter the sense and value of things as I see them, while you who listen to me must inevitably translate them according to the conception of things each one of you has within himself. We think we understand each other, but we never really do.⁷

For Pinter, however, communication may be difficult and painful -- thus avoided by most people -- but it is possible:

I think that we communicate only too well, in our silence, in what is unsaid, and that what takes place is continual evasion, desperate rear-guard attempts to keep ourselves to ourselves. Communication is too alarming. To enter into someone else's life is too frightening. To disclose to others the poverty within us is too fearsome a possibility.⁸

This basic difference in attitudes towards the efficacy of language and the possibility of communication shows that Pinter does not just follow

a lead provided by Ionesco's The Chairs. Pinter does not imply as Ionesco does that the saving truth does exist but simply cannot be communicated. Rather his drama shows that unambiguous truth is totally unavailable.

Technique is also an important ground for comparison between Pinter and Beckett and Ionesco. Naturally the similarities in technique are more obvious than the differences though these differences are important. While we are faced in a play by Beckett with considerable uncertainty, and with deliberate contradictions in an Ionesco play, the dramatic force of this uncertainty and contradiction is not so immediate and powerful as it is in Pinter's plays. For Pinter, the technique of non-verification leads directly to the problem of verification, both within the dramatic world as presented and by extension in our world. With Beckett and Ionesco these ramifications are not so inescapable:

We don't ask questions like these [about unverifiable problems] about an Ionesco or a Beckett play because we are far enough removed from the problems of believable reality within the play to be free from such fundamental concern, but with Pinter we do because his plays are real.⁹

In Beckett's plays the situation presented is removed, abstracted, by being located (in Waiting for Godot, for example) in "a symbolic landscape -- a rather unearthly setting with vaguely cosmic implications."¹⁰ Pinter's plays present action that is grounded in recognizable and believable settings and that arises from believable minds.

Whatever exists in the room [in a Pinter play] is made to exist at its maximum intensity. Nothing within our view is in any way abstract, as, say, the landscape of Waiting for Godot is abstract. Waiting for Godot takes place Nowhere, or Anywhere. But in The Room we are Somewhere. Environment is utterly explicit; every piece on the premises could be sold at auction, the place as a whole could be rented.¹¹

Esslin makes this same point with regard to Kafka and Beckett, the two

writers that Pinter openly professes to have "made the greatest impression on him",¹² when he writes:

But whereas both Kafka and Beckett are moving in a surreal world of acknowledged fantasy and dream, Pinter, essentially, remains on the firm ground of everyday reality . . .¹³

Another critic considers Ionesco and Beckett as compared to Pinter with reference to this same topic:

While Beckett created a play that treated realistically a surreal situation, and Ionesco developed obtuse, lengthy, cliché-ridden yet stimulating dialogue, Pinter has taken the realistic frame and used it to support many hyper-realistic elements.¹⁴

Thus Pinter's plays always exist in what he considers to be the real world, the world around us, and not some twice-removed hypothesis that a dramatist arbitrarily fits out to look like a room. His comments regarding the filming of The Caretaker substantiate this point:

What I'm very pleased about [. . .] is that in the film, as opposed to the play, we see a real house and real snow outside, dirty snow and the streets. We don't see them very often but they're there, the backs of houses and windows, attics in the distance. There is actually sky as well, a dirty one, and these characters move in the context of a real world -- as I believe they do. In the play, when people were confronted with just a set, a room and a door, they often assumed it was all taking place in limbo, in a vacuum, and the world outside hardly existed, or had existed at some point but was only half remembered.¹⁵

Ionesco, like Beckett, removes the situations that he presents away from reality as we see it; he backs away to nothingness. Speaking of The Chairs he says:

The subject of the play is not the message, nor the failures of life, nor the moral disaster of the two old people, but the chairs themselves; that is to say, the absence of people, the absence of the emperor, the absence of God, the absence of matter, the unreality of the world, metaphysical emptiness. The theme of the play is nothingness . . .¹⁶

In contrast to Ionesco's preoccupation with nothingness, Pinter states his goal very directly:

All I try to do, is describe some particular thing, a particular occurrence in a particular context. The meaning is there for the particular characters as they cope with the situation.¹⁷

Ionesco's search for nothingness is thus a process of generalization, often symbolized in his plays, paradoxically, by a proliferation of matter (for example, The Future is in Eggs, The New Tenant, or Amédée).

This tendency toward broadening or generalizing the perspective is shared to some extent by Beckett, as Chevigny points out:

The narrator of Beckett's story "The Calmative" loses his way and asks directions of a man who, in turn, demands of him the story of his life: "No details, he said, the main drift, the main drift." This could stand as motto . . . for Beckett's creative policy . . .¹⁸

For Pinter, as for Blake, "General knowledge is remote knowledge",¹⁹ and "minute particulars" constitute the only approach to an essential understanding of life. Kerr arrives at this realization by means of a study of Pinter as an existentialist artist and he points out that Pinter's plays do not simply restate the existentialist themes but rather actually "function according to existentialist principle".²⁰ Kerr differentiates between Beckett and Pinter by showing that Beckett's plays are constructed in the Platonic mold -- they portray the action (or inaction) of a predetermined concept:

Watching a Beckett play, we immediately engage in a little game of "Concept, concept, who's got the concept?", no doubt because we sense that, beyond the play's opaque surface, there lies a conceptual nub. We want to get at this, to abstract it. We know that it was abstract to begin with.

Watching a Pinter play, we give over the scramble to stick pins in ideas and fix them forever to a drawing-board. We feel that the drawing-board isn't there and

that our eager thumbs would only go through it. Instead of trying to bring matters to a halt by defining them, we permit them to move at will, understanding that we have been promised no terminal point. We give existence free rein, accept it as primary, refrain from demanding that it answer our questions, grant it the mystery of not yet having named itself.²¹

These fundamental differences between Pinter and his forerunners have implications concerning his approach to the problem that is the basis of this study. For Harold Pinter, the problem of verification is one of the central difficulties of the modern world, a world in which the glut of scientific data doubles every ten years, so that no human can comprehend it all. For Ionesco, the failure of communication and the abysmal nothingness of life is central. Beckett is concerned with verification, but only by the way. Didi's questioning of the nature of his plight is a reflection of the inaction that is life:

Was I sleeping, while the other suffered? Am I sleeping now? Tomorrow, when I wake, or think I do, what shall I say of today? That with Estragon my friend, at this place, until the fall of night, I waited for Godot? That Pozzo passed, with his carrier, and that he spoke to us? Probably. But in all that what truth will there be?²²

This is no full-fledged quest for verification but simply the despairing cry of one who realizes that the more things change, the more they are the same. Pinter's approach to the problem is much more central to an understanding of his works than is this passing comment. Even Pirandello, whose concern about the nature of truth is so important to a few of his plays, leaves a loophole that explains the problems of verification. Esslin points out this fact in a comment regarding The Collection:

The basic situation is reminiscent of Pirandello's Right You Are (If You Think You Are), where two, and eventually three, incompatible stories confront each other without hope of verification. The difference is that in Pirandello's

play either one, two, or all three of the characters involved may be mad and therefore unable to realize the true situation. In The Collection it is not a matter of madness but of subtle conscious or sub-conscious motivations.²³

The point, since Esslin fails to extend the thought far enough, is that in Pirandello's play there is the possibility, behind the veneer of madness, that truth actually exists. For Pinter in The Collection however, we cannot escape the simple all-encompassing directness of his earlier statement of the problem:

There are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false. The thing is not necessarily either true or false: it can be both true and false.²⁴

Thus, Pinter's exploration of verification through theme and technique is not entirely new, but is a tight, unyielding, and very specifically modern approach to life through drama. While he has learned much from Beckett, Ionesco and Pirandello, Pinter's work nonetheless offers insights into the complexities of truth -- be it personal, psychological or objective truth -- that are valid and important to a society in which nothing is wholly true and even less is wholly false.

Moreover, Pinter's realizations about verification are reflected in almost all of his works, even his earliest unpublished novel, which was later adapted for radio as The Dwarfs (1960).²⁵ This play and a later one, The Homecoming (1965), though they do not warrant individual study in terms of the focus of this thesis, do contain passages that are astoundingly apt as concluding remarks. These passages are climactic in the sense that they reveal the breadth as well as the intellectual solidity of Pinter's thoughts regarding the problem of verification. They serve well as a conclusion to this thesis in that they recapitulate and amplify

many of the important realizations of the study. They are concerned with perception, the nature of reality and personality, and generally with the problem of verification. For example, one speech by Lenny epitomizes Pinter's realization that a person's comprehension of things and events varies according to an infinite number of factors. Lenny, in his first meeting with Ruth, complains that he has trouble sleeping:

Eh listen, I wonder if you can advise me. I've been having a bit of a rough time with this clock. The tick's been keeping me up. The trouble is I'm not all that convinced it was the clock. I mean there are lots of things which tick in the night, don't you find that? All sorts of objects, which, in the day, you wouldn't call anything else but commonplace. They give you no trouble. But in the night any given one of a number of them is liable to start letting out a bit of a tick. Whereas you look at these objects in the day and they're just commonplace. They're as quiet as mice during the daytime. So . . . all things being equal . . . this question of me saying it was the clock that woke me up, well, that could very easily prove something of a false hypothesis. (28)

Lenny's thoughts on this matter relate both to Edward and Disson's problems of perception and to the broader concept that reality itself may not be simple and one-dimensional. Lenny's concern with the possibilities of objects, and with the problem of a "false hypothesis" suggests that he understands the nature of reality as Pinter's plays dramatize it better than most of Pinter's characters. Certainly Lenny is better equipped to comprehend reality than his brother Teddy, whose stock-in-trade is philosophy:

LENNY. Well, for instance, take a table. Philosophically speaking. What is it?

TEDDY. A table.

LENNY. Ah. You mean it's nothing else but a table. Well, some people would envy your certainty, wouldn't they, Joey? For instance, I've got a couple of friends of mine, we often sit round the Ritz Bar having a few liqueurs, and they're always saying things like that, you know, things like: Take a table, take it. All right, I say, take it, take a table, but once you've taken it, what you going to do with it? Once you've got hold of it where you going to take it?

MAX. You'd probably sell it.
 LENNY. You wouldn't get much for it.
 JOEY. Chop it up for firewood.
LENNY looks at him and laughs.
 RUTH. Don't be too sure though. You've forgotten something.
 Look at me. I . . . move my leg. That's all it is.
 But I wear . . . underwear . . . which moves with me
 . . . it captures your attention. Perhaps you misinterpret.
 The action is simple. It's a leg . . . moving.
 My lips move. Why don't you restrict . . . your
 observations to that? Perhaps the fact that they move
 is more significant . . . than the words which come
 through them. You must bear that . . . possibility
 . . . in mind.
Silence.

(52-3)

Ruth's speech reiterates another main point that is important to this thesis -- that action is more significant than content. This is why the struggle between Stan and Goldberg and McCann, portrayed as a cross-examination, is more important than the actual accusations made. The truth of Davies' claims about his papers is of less dramatic import than the aura of uncertainty Pinter creates around him. Edward's response to the matchseller is of greater moment than who or what the matchseller is. The actual truth of that night in Leeds is of less consequence than the simple depiction of James' urgent but inconclusive quest for verification. Thus, a critic of Pinter's plays must be careful not to lose the "intellectual equilibrium" (62) that Teddy ironically claims he has, and must continually be open to possibilities.

Pinter explains some of the reasons for this fact of life in The Dwarfs, where he shows that what are normally considered the natural limits of physical objects are not always adhered to by those objects.

LEN. The rooms we live in . . . open and shut. (Pause.)
 Can't you see? They change shape at their own will.
 I wouldn't grumble if only they would keep to some
 consistency. But they don't. And I can't tell the

limits, the boundaries, which I've been led to believe are natural. I'm all for the natural behaviour of rooms, doors, staircases, the lot. But I can't rely on them. (99)

Once again this problem calls to mind the failures of perception experienced by Edward and Disson. Moreover, the problem does not relate merely to objects, but includes the difficulties inherent in discerning the natural limits of personalities as in The Lover, or even natural moral limits. This is part of James' problem in The Collection. Pinter, however, also mentions a remedy for this problem which bears some similarity to Brecht's concept of an "india rubber man":

PETE. Do you know what your trouble is? You're not elastic. There's no elasticity in you. You want to be more elastic.
 LEN. Elastic? Elastic. Yes, you're quite right. Elastic. What are you talking about?
 PETE. Giving up the ghost isn't so much a failure as a tactical error. By elastic I mean being prepared for your own deviations. You don't know where you're going to come out next at the moment. You're like a rotten old shirt. Buck your ideas up. They'll lock you up before you're much older.
 LEN. No. There is a different sky each time I look. The clouds run about in my eye. I can't do it.
 PETE. The apprehension of experience must obviously be dependent upon discrimination if it's to be considered valuable. That's what you lack. You've got no idea how to preserve a distance between what you smell and what you think about it. You haven't got the faculty for making a simple distinction between one thing and another. Every time you walk out of this door you go straight over a cliff. What you've got to do is nourish the power of assessment. How can you hope to assess and verify anything if you walk about with your nose stuck between your feet all day long?

(100-101)

Pete, though he encourages elasticity, fails to realize his own self-contradiction, since he goes on to extol the virtues of discrimination, assessment and verification. Perhaps it is unwittingly that he has implied that "ideas" can "lock you up", a principle with which

Pinter would heartily agree. For Pinter, too often ideas as absolutes can chain a person to an outmoded, useless view of the world, thus crippling him in his apprehension of reality. Len himself appears to comprehend the difficulties of perception and communication:

LEN. The point is, who are you? Not why or how, not even what. I can see what, perhaps, clearly enough. But who are you? It's no use saying you know who you are just because you tell me you can fit your particular key into a particular slot, which will only receive your particular key because that's not foolproof and certainly not conclusive. Just because you're inclined to make these statements of faith has nothing to do with me. It's not my business. Occasionally I believe I perceive a little of what you are but that's pure accident. Pure accident on both our parts, the perceived and the perceiver. It's nothing like an accident, it's deliberate, it's a joint pretence. We depend on these accidents, on these contrived accidents, to continue. It's not important then that it's conspiracy or hallucination. What you are, or appear to be to me, or appear to be to you, changes so quickly, so horrifyingly, I certainly can't keep up with it and I'm damn sure you can't either. But who you are I can't even begin to recognize, and sometimes I recognize it so wholly, so forcibly, I can't look, and how can I be certain of what I see? You have no number. Where am I to look, where am I to look, what is there to locate, so as to have some surety, to have some rest from this whole bloody racket? You're the sum of so many reflections. How many reflections? Whose reflections? Is that what you consist of? What scum does the tide leave? What happens to the scum? When does it happen? I've seen what happens. But I can't speak when I see it. I can only point a finger. I can't even do that. The scum is broken and sucked back. I don't see where it goes. I don't see when, what do I see, what have I seen? What have I seen, the scum or the essence? What about it? Does all this give you the right to stand there and tell me you know who you are?

(111-112)

In this speech Pinter enunciates the basic problem of any artist, even the critic, while also providing a climactic statement of the concerns of this thesis. When "what you are [. . .] changes so quickly, so horrifyingly", all the problems of verification arise. The world is not formed

of the stable and continuous reality that our everyday concepts lead us to believe. If reality is actually no more than "the sum of so many reflections", or the infinite combinations of all the facets of possibilities, then absolute and verified knowledge is simply not available in our world. Our society considers truth a precious commodity that should rightfully be available to all. Pinter's drama shows that it is not available, but Pinter does not despair. To replace the security provided by a concept of essential, verifiable, absolute truth, he offers the incredible largesse of infinite ambiguity and possibilities to the imaginative man who is willing to throw himself headfirst into the pit. But the richness of possibilities is available only when the impossibility of verification is allowed.

These are the inescapable conclusions reached when Pinter's drama is considered in the light of verification and non-verification. Not only are these concepts important in terms of dramatic technique (and here, perhaps, is Pinter's greatest debt to Beckett and Ionesco), but they also form the foundation of much of his thematic material. If Pinter were a philosopher, in all likelihood his basic tenet would be the doctrine of the impossibility of verification. With this he could explain the modern world. Thus, his plays, when viewed in this light, become more satisfying and even clearer -- the contradictions, vagueness, and undefinable situations and events are recognizable as valid and important images of life and not simply arbitrary sources of mystification. This is the road to an understanding of Pinter's plays and leads also to acceptance of at least one facet of the literary greatness of his work.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter I

¹ Esslin, The Peopled Wound, 33-4.

² Taylor, Anger and After, 287.

Chapter II

¹ See Esslin, The Peopled Wound (46), for an explanation of the source of this phrase.

² This is not to imply that communication between people is impossible in Pinter's view. Rather, communication as it is normally understood is very difficult, while a lower level of communication (sub-conscious?) is unavoidable. See pages 97-99 above for more details regarding Pinter's view of communication.

³ All quotations from Pinter's dramatic works are from the Methuen editions. In my transcriptions of these quotations, three dots -- . . . -- indicate Pinter's own pauses; deletions are represented by three dots enclosed in square brackets -- [. . .].

⁴ Note, for example, Esslin's comments, as he describes the blind Negro as a "too overtly symbolical and poetic figure" and as a "cliché metaphor" (The Peopled Wound, 62-3). See also Wellwarth who states that "Pinter has spoiled the play by succumbing to the temptation to put in some juvenile symbolism" (Protest and Paradox, 200).

⁵ See page 62 above and footnote number five (Chapter V), where some critical views of Pinter's concern with names are cited.

⁶ Esslin, Theatre of the Absurd, 234.

⁷ Compare Hayman's similar conclusion where he suggests that the endings of The Room, The Dumb Waiter, The Birthday Party, and A Night Out are each "perfectly consistent with the illogical logic of the play" (Harold Pinter, 31).

⁸ See, for example, The Peopled Wound (65), where Esslin discusses the possibility that Rose is a Jewess.

⁹ Esslin, Theatre of the Absurd, 238.

¹⁰ Esslin, The Peopled Wound, 81-4.

¹¹ Ibid., 79.

¹² Pinter, Poems.

Chapter III

¹ Blake, "The Mental Traveller", l. 63 in Complete Writings, 426.

² Pirandello, Naked Masks, 98.

³ Perhaps the cessation of questioning leads to Ionesco's movement away to nothingness and despair. See pages 100-101 above.

Chapter IV

¹ Page two above.

² Pinter, "Writing for the Theatre", Evergreen Review VIII, #33, 80.

³ For an interesting approach to Pinter as existentialist dramatist, see W. Kerr's study Harold Pinter, mentioned on pages 101-102 above.

⁴ "Harold Pinter: The Art of the Theatre III", an interview by L. Bensky in Paris Review #39, 30.

Chapter V

¹ Naturally a good stage production would attempt to present the matchseller as nearly undefined as possible, his clothes bulky and shapeless, and his face mostly covered.

² Taylor's description of the matchseller as a "monumentally non-committal figure" (Anger and After, 293) calls to mind Melville's Bartleby.

³ This is Flora's description of the matchseller (18), but is not verified within the play.

⁴ For example, Edward compares himself, "when [. . .] no more than a stripling" (39) to the matchseller, who appears to Edward to be growing younger.

⁵ Hinchliffe mentions that Flora's action in naming Barnabas "solves the problem of his identity" (Harold Pinter, 69) for her. Hollis points out that "The act of 'naming' is central to The Room" (Poetics of Silence, 132). I would only add that both place names and proper names seem to fascinate Pinter.

⁶ Consider, for example, some of the metaphors expressed in Pinter's titles: a room metamorphoses into a cell or tomb; a character is portrayed as a dumb waiter; a birthday party becomes a death-day ritual; and so on.

Chapter VI

¹ Esslin, The Peopled Wound, 175-6.

² Ibid., 171-8.

Chapter VII

¹ The rules of Richard and Sara's games, and how they are broken, call to mind a number of other plays which deal with similar subjects. Compare, for example, Pirandello's The Rules of the Game and Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf.

² Perhaps this would be a situation similar to that of Edward meeting the matchseller.

³ Compare the drastic change of tone in The Birthday Party (36) when Stan receives his drum as a birthday present.

⁴ Kitchin contrasts "Compressionism" with the "Picaresque" in Mid-Century Drama, 115-22.

Chapter VIII

¹ Blake, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell", 154.

Chapter IX

¹ Page two above.

² Another play by Pinter that is constructed of a web of lies is Night School (1960).

³ Gordon, Stratagems to Uncover Nakedness, 52.

Chapter X

¹ Sophocles, Oedipus Rex, 16.

² Woolf, The Common Reader, 184-95.

³Shakespeare, Macbeth, I, iii, 127.

⁴Esslin, The Peopled Wound, 29.

⁵Ibid., 40.

⁶Esslin, Theatre of the Absurd, 63.

⁷Pirandello, 224.

⁸Esslin, The Peopled Wound, 41-2.

⁹Nelson, "Harold Pinter Goes to the Movies", Chicago Review, XIX, #1, 37.

¹⁰Hinchliffe, 41.

¹¹Kerr, 12.

¹²Esslin, The Peopled Wound, 29.

¹³Ibid., 29.

¹⁴Gallagher, "Harold Pinter's Dramaturgy", Quarterly Journal of Speech, LII, 1966, 242.

¹⁵Hinchliffe, 99.

¹⁶Esslin, Theatre of the Absurd, 123.

¹⁷"Pinterview", Newsweek, July 23, 1962, 69.

¹⁸Chevigny, "Introduction", Twentieth Century Interpretations of Endgame, 1.

¹⁹Blake, "A Vision of The Last Judgement", 611.

²⁰Kerr, 3.

²¹Ibid., 9.

²²Beckett, Waiting for Godot, 58.

²³Esslin, The Peopled Wound, 131.

²⁴Ibid., 33.

²⁵Later, in 1963, The Dwarfs was staged.

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